

ANCIENT  
CHINESE BRONZE MIRRORS

*By the same Author*

SIDELIGHTS OF PEKING LIFE

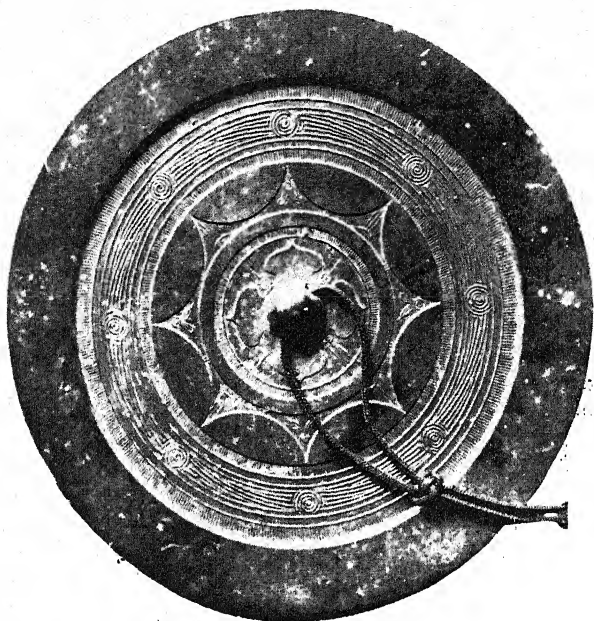
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Diameter 5½-in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

1.—HAN PRESENTATION MIRROR

*Chang i tzü sun* 長宜子孫

“May you have for ever dutiful sons and grandsons.”

See page 47

# *ANCIENT CHINESE BRONZE MIRRORS*

*by*

*R. W. Swallow*



*PEIPING  
HENRI VETCH  
MCMXXXVII*

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## P R E F A C E

THIS book was written for the most part in Kaifengfu in the Spring and early Summer of the year 1930, and though many changes and additions have been made to it since then, it may be said to owe its being to my residence in that ancient city and to the associations connected with my stay there. To those who are interested in anachronisms it may be stated that it was begun to the sound of artillery fire taking place at a battle some twenty miles away, and that the work was several times interrupted by air raids.

The writing of a book of this nature in one of the historic centres of China, and near to many of the places from which the ancient relics are obtained, has much to commend it, but at the same time there are disadvantages which must not be overlooked. The author, amongst other things, deeply regrets not having been able to visit Japan, where there are not only some very fine collections of Chinese bronzes, but also some of the foremost authorities in the world on Chinese art, from whom much valuable information might have been obtained.

On the other hand, if historical atmosphere and surroundings are of any value, probably no better place than Kaifengfu could have been chosen. It is the provincial capital of Honan, and not far from the district where the Chinese race is supposed to have originated. During the Sung Dynasty it was the national capital, and in its museums can be seen the famous Hsincheng bronzes and other great treasures of the past. In the north of the province is Changtefu (Anyang), where so many relics of the Shang and Chou dynasties have been found, and from there southward to the Yellow River are many places famous in history, the best known being Hueihsien, with its wonderful springs which, with the hills in the background, made it one of the favourite burial grounds of the past.

Crossing the river and moving westward we come to Loyang, the most wonderful city of ancient China, and the capital during no fewer than six dynasties. From there to Hsianfu, in the neighbouring province of Shensi, there is scarcely a foot of ground that has not been the scene of some desperate struggle or other. Southwest of Kaifeng are Hsincheng where the bronzes were discovered in 1923, Hsiaoyuchow, the site of the famous kilns where the now priceless Chün-yao pottery was once made; Yenling, an important burial ground in former days, and many other places famous in Chinese history. Eastward going into Anhwei there is the Huai River Valley, where many beautiful bronzes and jades have been found, especially in the neighbourhood of Showchow.

Much may be learnt from men who come from these places, for they have seen the things recovered from the ground and know the traditions and stories connected with them. Their tales may not always be strictly accurate, but they have practical experience and often know things denied to the mere scholar and student of history.

The author is deeply indebted to Bishop White, formerly of Kaifeng, and Mr. Orvar Karlbeck, both of whom have spent many years in the study of Chinese bronzes, and who are recognized authorities on the subject. He is also indebted, though in a lesser degree, because the opportunities for intercourse have been fewer, to Dr. H. Mueller, the well-known archaeologist of Peking, and the Rev. J. Menzies, formerly of Changtsefu, whose knowledge of ancient China, especially North Honan, is truly encyclopædic, and who has kindly corrected many of the translations of the inscriptions reproduced here. His Exc. K. T. Ouang and Prof. M. K. Jao of the Honan University, have given much valuable help, especially with the inscriptions.

He is also under a great obligation to Mr. Ling Shih-an, the ever courteous proprietor of the Chun Ku Chai Curio Shop in Kaifeng, who has more practical knowledge of Honan antiques than any man alive, and who has an

unerring eye for imitations or reconstructed pieces. Mr. Kuo Chin-chen and many other dealers have also been very helpful, and have often given information that could not have been obtained from any other source, while Mr. H. F. Hu has ever been a guide, philosopher and friend, and by his sound scholarship and knowledge of Chinese history has helped to solve many difficult problems.

Mr. Mark M. Lu, the journalist, has helped with the translations; while through the kindness of Dr. L. T. Yuan, the Director of the National Library of Peiping, and his learned assistant Mr. Hsu Hung-pao, the author was able to study many books and documents that could not be found elsewhere.

The value of the book, whatever it may be, has been greatly increased by the incorporation in it of the analysis made by Mr. S. J. F. Jensen of Shanghai of certain pieces of bronze which the author gave him. It will be seen that there is no foundation whatever for the statements often made that the ancients were wont to mix gold and silver with their copper. In fact, it would seem on the contrary that they were very skilful in the refining of metals and were not so simple as some people would have us believe.

Much attention has been paid by the author to Chinese books on antiques, especially the *Chin Shih So*, or "Compendium of Metals and Stones," for while some of these old Chinese authorities are not to be relied upon when giving the date or period of a piece, they can supply us with much useful information, especially of a historical character. From them comes the idea of substituting rubbings in certain cases for photographs, for by this means the designs are often more clearly seen and the characters on the inscriptions easier to decipher.

With regard to the photographs, much help was received from that great enthusiast of Chinese things, Mr. J. M. Plumer of the Maritime Customs, who personally took many of them and who gave unsparingly of his time and experience in order to make them a success.

This book makes no claims whatever to be authoritative or final. Very little is really known about the early Chinese bronzes and it will take years of study and archaeological research to put things on a proper basis. The Ch'in period is still a baffling problem, and the truth will not be known until further explorations are made in the neighbourhood of Hsianfu, which was the capital of the dynasty.

The recent researches made into the contents of various tombs at Chintsun, near Loyang, by Bishop White and a number of Chinese scholars, have shown that mirrors were buried in graves in the latter part of the Chou Dynasty, probably about 500 B.C., whereas it was previously thought that the practise originated some 200 or 300 years later in the Ch'in Dynasty. This has been substantiated by the finding of a mirror amongst some Chou bronzes in Hsunhsien in Honan and which is now in one of the museums in Kaifengfu. This mirror has no design on it, but has a thin elongated knob, quite unlike those found on the later mirrors.

It is much to be regretted that the beautiful photographs so kindly sent by Monsieur H. Lambert did not arrive in time to allow of their being incorporated with the other illustrations in the book, but they are of sufficient value and interest to be treated as a separate entity.

To those who may be tempted to start a collection of ancient mirrors the author wishes the best of fortune and hopes that they will gain as much pleasure as he has out of this innocent and instructive pastime.

R. W. S.

## CHINESE DYNASTIES

### The Three Dynasties known as the San Tai 三代

Hsia 夏 (Legendary)	2205-1767 B.C.
Shang 商 (also known as Yin 殷)	1766-1122 B.C.
Chou 周	1122—255 B.C.

Modern Chinese archæologists divide the Chou Dynasty into three periods:

Chou Dynasty proper	1122-722 B.C.
Period of the <i>Spring and Autumn Annals</i>	722-481 B.C.
Warring States Period, Lieh Kuo 列國	481-221 B.C.

From 255 to 249 B.C. the nominal ruler was the Chou emperor, but his authority was practically non-existent.

Ch'in 秦	249-206 B.C.
Han 漢	206 B.C.—A.D. 220

### The Three Kingdoms or San Kuo 三國 A.D. 220-277

The three dynasties of this period were Minor Han 蜀 漢 in Szechwan (221-263), the Wei 魏 (220-264) and the Wu 吳 (222-277).

### The Six Dynasties or Liu Chao 六朝 . . . A.D. 222-589

These were: the Wu of the Three Kingdoms' period, the Eastern Chin 東 晉 (317-419), the Sung 宋 (420-478), the Ch'i 齊 (479-501), the Liang 梁 (502-556), and the Ch'en 陳 (557-587).

During this disturbed period of divided China also reigned the Western Chin (265-316), the Northern or Pei Ch'i (557-581), the Northern Wei (386-535), the Western Wei (535-557), and Eastern Wei (535-550) and the Northern Chou (557-581).

Sui 隋	A.D. 589—617
T'ang 唐	A.D. 617—906
The Five Dynasties or Wu Chao 五 朝	A.D. 906—959
Northern Sung 北 宋	A.D. 960-1127
Southern Sung 南 宋	A.D. 1127-1280
Yüan 元 or Mongol Dynasty	A.D. 1280-1368
Ming 明	A.D. 1368-1643
Ch'ing 清 or Manchu Dynasty	A.D. 1644-1911

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- Po Ku T'u* 博古圖, "Diagrams of the Hundred Antiques." A Sung catalogue, published A.D. 1110.

## CHAPTER I

### CH'IN HOU WU KU 秦後無古

*After the Ch'in nothing can be accounted old.*

No writer on ancient Chinese things need desire a better text than the above. It is terse, and in the best Chinese literary style tells us that after the death of the great historical figure Ch'in Shih Huang 秦始皇, the destroyer of the literati and the builder of the Great Wall, the skill of the craftsmen and workers in stone and metals declined to such a degree that they belong to another and inferior epoch, and cannot be compared with their predecessors of the Ch'in and the Three Dynasties.

The text is more than a mere phrase, it is more like the reasoned verdict of a great scientist, who, after years of study and close examination of numberless experiments, feels himself justified in giving to the world a natural law or theory formed from the facts known to him. We can also without much difficulty trace the origin and source of inspiration of our text, and read the mind of the noble utterer, as he advanced from stage to stage, until he became at last the perfect collector and lover of things ancient. In his younger days he would be little more than a scholar and dilettante, interested in calligraphy and the reading of scrolls and inscriptions; then, as his acquaintances increased and he had opportunities of seeing the collections of others, he would gradually begin to acquire things for himself, old books, scrolls, paintings, a jade charm or two, a few pieces of porcelain and some carved wood furniture for decorative purposes. From here his progress was easy, and limited only by opportunity and the amount of wealth at his command. As he acquired the rarer pieces, his loves and fancies would undergo startling changes: things that had seemed to him beautiful and desirable but a short time before would now appear uninteresting and commonplace, and not worth the time and money he had spent on them.

A few half obliterated characters written by some master hand would interest him more than a houseful of scrolls and paintings by inferior artists; a fragment of San Tai jade would be far preferable to the expensive baubles of the later ages. For him the value of a bronze or a piece of sculpture would depend largely upon the inscriptions on it, while some of his most treasured possessions would be broken bits of bone on which were carved a few ancient characters. Then and not till then could he be reckoned amongst the prophets, and allowed to say without contradiction: "After the Ch'in nothing can be accounted old."

We, of the West, can never fully appreciate the written Chinese character, no matter how beautifully it is formed, for to us it can never be much more than a symbol, valuable only for the information it gives. On the other hand we do not fall far behind our Eastern friends in our admiration of their ancient treasures and works of art, and we see that there is a grandeur and dignity about them that is lacking in those made in more recent times. We know and feel that a Ming bronze, even of the very best type, looks commonplace and tawdry when compared with one of the Shang or Chou periods, and we would not change our wonderful Ch'in mirror for the finest product of the time of Ch'ien Lung.

The materials used in the ancient days seem to have been better than those used in the later periods, though much further study remains to be done on this subject; and while in some instances time has had a devastating effect on the old pieces, in other cases it has added a mellowness and a variety of colours which greatly increase their artistic value. He is indeed a poor fellow who will not admit that patina,<sup>1</sup> freakish though it may be at times, adds much to the interest of a bronze and often has a strange and startling effect. The ancient draughtsmen were wonderful artists, and the shapes of many of the

<sup>1</sup>The Chinese sometimes call patina Yang Kuei Fei's dust, after the famous beauty of the T'ang Dynasty, Yang Kuei Fei 楊貴妃.



pieces they designed leave little to be desired. The workmanship is excellent, and the carvings on the Hsin-cheng and Chintsun jades, have never been surpassed by those of any other age. The designs however are at times a little crude, and depend too much on the meandering pattern, which is the godchild of the swastika.

Many of the chief foreign collectors are following in the footsteps of their Chinese confrères and placing more and more value upon the older pieces. A friend of mine has lately told me of a visit paid to one of the most famous collections in the world where the hostess hurried the guests through rooms filled with almost priceless porcelains, explaining in a deprecating manner that these things were not of much interest, but that when they came to the Han and pre-Han bronzes and jades they would find something really to admire. One can almost see the spirit of the phrase maker rising out of its resting place in the shadows of the Great Wall and pointing to the good lady as one to be honoured and esteemed.

Another sign of the times is the constant complaint of the dealers that the demand is for ancient and unusual pieces, and that the prices for all other things are remarkably low. It is useless to labour the point, for there is evidence enough to prove that the ancient wares of China are being enthusiastically sought after and admired. The only pity is that our knowledge of them is so haphazard and vague, and depends more upon tradition than upon historical and scientific data.

Having delivered myself of this homily I must confess that in a manner not unknown to preachers, whether of religion or politics, I have set forth an ideal impossible to attain, and while Ch'in mirrors occupy an important and honoured place in this treatise, I have gone far beyond the limits of the text and shall not only descend into the times of the Han (206 B.C.—A.D. 220), but after skipping lightly over the next four hundred or so years, noted chiefly for constant wars and change of dynasties, I shall try to show that the mirrors of the T'ang period (A.D. 617-906) are

not without merit, and even take high rank when compared with those of more ancient origin.

My moral collapse ends with the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960-1280), but here surely I may be forgiven, since my object is to prove that the mirrors of this period show a sad decline in both quality and workmanship, and that many of them are merely poor reproductions of those made in the previous ages.

Of the succeeding five hundred odd years from the end of the Sung Dynasty to the present day, it is neither wise nor opportune for me to speak ; but in the course of time there may be someone who will have courage enough to write a book on Modern Chinese Mirrors.

## CHAPTER II

### MIRRORS IN ANCIENT TIMES

WITHOUT doubt mirrors have been used in China since times immemorial, and their importance was greatly increased by the fact that not only were they used as looking glasses, but, being credited with all kinds of magical powers, were supposed to ward off evil influences, and in some cases even to be able to forecast the future. The most remarkable ones were those used by physicians in diagnosing diseases, as they were said to be able to reflect the interior of the patient's body, thus predating by some two thousand years the discovery of the X-ray.

They figure largely in ancient legends and stories, and were in great demand at festivals and ceremonies of various kinds. A soldier going to the wars would wear one on his breast to protect him from harm; the new bride being carried to her husband's home would hold one over her heart,<sup>1</sup> so that no ill fortune could beset her; an official setting out for his new post would welcome them as gifts from his friends, as they would help him to get quick promotion. They made fitting birthday presents, especially if they had inscriptions denoting longevity or wishing good fortune to the recipient's sons and grandsons, who would naturally treasure them as heirlooms.

Mirrors with handles were carried by the dancing girls when performing before the Court, and more than one emperor wrote inscriptions for them. Even at the present-day mirrors may be seen over the front doors of shops or houses that happen to be near to or opposite places where ill-luck or misfortune abounds;<sup>2</sup> when waved in front of a devil on the stage they will cause the evil one to tremble with fear.

<sup>1</sup> This custom still exists in many parts of China, though in some places it is the bridegroom who carries the mirror.


<sup>2</sup> Coffin shops, coal depots, and many other places are said to be unlucky.

From the Han Dynasty onwards they were much used in funeral ceremonies, and were put in the tomb on the dead person's chest, in which case they were known as *hu hsin ching* 護心鏡, or "heart protecting mirrors"; on some of them the marks of the cloth in which they were wrapped may be clearly seen. Mirrors and other bronze articles belonging to the Ch'in period have been discovered in large pits, some 40 to 50 feet below the surface of the ground, which appear to be graves, but up to the present no coffins or bones have been found in them. I have, however, seen Ch'in mirrors with the imprint of textiles plainly visible on them, which would seem to show that they had been taken from graves.

This burying of mirrors is a matter of great importance, as otherwise most, if not all, of them would have been destroyed with the passing of time, and our knowledge of them limited to the illustrations and references found in certain ancient Chinese books.

Tradition says that in primitive times the young ladies, like their modern sisters, were not unaware of their charms, and used the clear waters of a pool or stream as a looking glass, even lingering awhile to admire themselves after their toilet was finished. In later times a water *kang* was used for the same purpose.<sup>3</sup>

We hear of stone mirrors, some of which seem to have been merely rocks with polished surfaces, but our knowledge of these early times is very incomplete and founded on tradition rather than on fact. To make matters worse the *Po Ku T'u* 博古圖, or "Diagrams of the Hundred Antiques," the best known of Chinese reference books on the subject, not only makes no mention of pre-Han mirrors, but also completely ignores the Ch'in Dynasty, though it gives great prominence to the bronzes of the San Tai period.

<sup>3</sup> The old way of writing *ching* (mirror)  represents a man looking down on a water *kang*.

<sup>4</sup> Hundred in this instance is used in the general sense of many or all.

Practically all the other reference books are equally negligent, and it is probably for this reason that many collectors have been under the impression that there is no proof that mirrors existed prior to the times of the Han. In contradiction to this belief it may be pointed out that in the *Chin Shih So* 金石索, or "Compendium of Gold and Stone Articles," there is a diagram of a mirror made in the Sung Dynasty which is supposed to be a reproduction of one belonging to the Emperor Hsüan Yüan 軒轅, who had twelve mirrors, one for each month of the year, the particular month being denoted by the zodiacal animal shown on the front of the mirror. The one in the *Chin Shih So* being that of the cow or twelfth month.

We are indebted to the *Ke Chih Ching Yüan* 格致鏡源, or "Enquiry into the Origin of Things," for the further information that, for each succeeding month after the first, the diameter of these mirrors increased by one inch, so that if the January mirror was one inch in diameter that of December was twelve inches. Furthermore we are told that the emperors of the Chou Dynasty actually had thirteen of these mirrors, provision being made for the intercalary month. This would seem to show that the said emperors were cautious souls and left little to chance. Other authorities say that the Emperor Hsüan Yüan had fifteen mirrors, but this conflicts with the idea of one for each month. Returning to the *Chin Shih So*, we learn that Chou Wu Wang 周武王, the founder of the Chou Dynasty, was the first one to write an inscription for a mirror, and the words he chose were as follows:

*I ching tzu chao chien hsin jung* 以鏡自照見形容

*I jên tzu chao chien chi hsiung* 以人自照見吉凶

which may be translated: "When you look at yourself in a mirror you observe your own appearance. When you see yourself reflected in others you can read your fortune or misfortune."

Again the well-known saying of the Chou Dynasty *yin chien pu yüan* 殷鑑不遠,<sup>5</sup> "the Shang mirror is not far away" (i.e., the necessary example is not far away for it may be seen in a Shang mirror), would seem to show that mirrors existed in the Shang Dynasty. From this and the other examples quoted, to say nothing about the many stories handed down from ancient times with regard to the miraculous powers attributed to various mirrors, it would seem that there is no reason to doubt that they were used in China from the very earliest days, but of their exact shape and nature it is more difficult to speak.

There are a number of good judges who maintain that some of the so-called Ch'in mirrors from their appearance seem to belong to the Chou period. They refer particularly to the ones with the *t'ao t'ieh* 饕餮 design, and to those that have a pierced or openwork decoration portraying dragons or other strange animals, while the actual reflecting surface is composed of a separate piece of metal which is riveted on to the front part.<sup>6</sup>

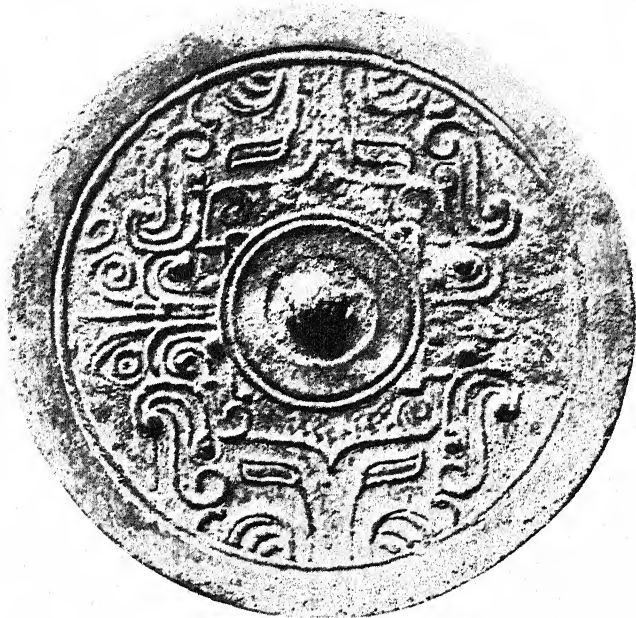
The mirrors with the silkworm pattern would also seem to belong to these earlier types, but it is not possible to fix the date of their manufacture.

The mirrors referred to above, together with others of a similar nature, may be Chou mirrors, which were still in use during Ch'in times; or they may have been made during the latter period but according to Chou designs, a not unlikely contingency considering the circumstances prevailing when one dynasty succeeded the other.<sup>7</sup> Recent researches made into the contents of certain tombs at Chintsun, one of the former sites of Loyang, show that in all probability the mirrors with the pierced or openwork

<sup>5</sup> *Yin* is another name for Shang (1766-1122 B.C.) The quotation in question is a warning to remember the fate of the Shang rulers, and the word *chien* (mirror) is used in the figurative sense.

<sup>6</sup> These mirrors are called by the Chinese *Chia Ching* 夾鏡.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that none of these early mirrors have been found at Changtefu (Anyang), where relics of the Shang and Chou Dynasties are continually being excavated, seems to prove that it was not the custom to bury mirrors in the tombs of those times. However a mirror has recently been found amongst some tomb relics of the Chou period at Hsunhsien in North East Honan.



Diameter 3-in.

*Locality* : LOYANG

Author's Collection

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

2.—CH'IN MIRROR

with T'ao T'ieh or "Glutton" design

One of earliest types of Ch'in mirrors, probably of Chou origin.



### 3.—WARRING STATES TYPE OF MIRROR

DESCRIPTION: A pierced or openwork type of mirror with riveted reflector. This mirror is supposed to have come from one of the "Piao Bell" tombs at Chintsun near Loyang. The inscription on one of these bells refers to events which took place about 550 B.C., so this type of mirror is probably of Chou origin.

This particular mirror, however, is a reconstructed piece, the reflecting surface being new, also the knob, while the outer border is missing.



decoration and the riveted reflecting surface belong to the period of the Lieh Kuo, or Warring States, and were in use during the sixth century B.C.

When we come to the Ch'in period we are confronted by the strange fact that, although the beauty and elegance of the mirrors was proverbial,—for was not a good magistrate spoken of as *Ch'in ching kao hsüan* 秦鏡高懸,<sup>s</sup> “a Ch'in mirror hung up”—, yet they seem to have disappeared from sight until the last few years, during which time a number of them have come to light. As far as I know the first foreign authority to call attention to them was Mr. O. Karlbeck, who in the January 1926 number of the *China Journal* describes some which had been found in the Huai River Valley district in the province of Anhwei. Dr. O. Sirén in his book, *The History of Early Chinese Art*, also deals with the same subject.

We now know that these beautiful and interesting things are found not only in the Huai Valley but also in various parts of Honan, especially round Loyang and Hueih sien, that famous old city north of the Yellow River. Some truly magnificent specimens have come out, but the price has risen greatly and the pieces really worth having quickly pass out of sight and go to enrich the splendours of some already great collections. However, to the true enthusiast all things are possible.

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<sup>s</sup> When the people of a district wish to show respect to a departing magistrate they present him with a wooden tablet with the above words on it.

### CHAPTER III

## CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE DYNASTIES

THE Chinese mind, steeped as it is in history and historical allusions,<sup>1</sup> thinks of the past in terms of the imperial dynasties, and the same system of classification is used when speaking of curios and objects of art. The names a Han bronze, a Sung painting, or a Ming bowl are examples in common use; it is not until they come to speak of things of the Ch'ing or Manchu period that the emperors are mentioned individually, and we hear of "Five Coloured" K'ang Hsi ware, a Ch'ien Lung screen and a Tao Kuang vase (probably a reproduction of an earlier period).

This system is at first confusing to a foreigner whose acquaintance with Chinese history is very limited, and to whom even Ts'ao Ts'ao is little more than a name. It also suffers from being too elastic, though this defect is remedied to some extent by such phrases as *Han mo ti shih hou* 漢末的時候, "towards the end of the Han Dynasty," or T'ang-Sung, a description which is self-explanatory, and which shows the difficulty sometimes found in stating the exact period to which an object belongs. It proves also that a new dynasty did not always mean a complete revolution in artistic taste, though it was inevitable that at such times great changes should take place. It must be remembered that the best workmen were engaged for the Court, and the finest wares came from the imperial kilns and factories; that during the devastation, inseparable from the overthrow of the imperial house, many of these places would be destroyed and the workmen scattered or forced into retirement. Some of these, including many of the oldest and most experienced men, would probably never return to their

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<sup>1</sup> Through the theatre and the story-tellers even the illiterate are familiar with the great figures of history.

work, and such secrets as they possessed would die with them.

Again the founders of a new dynasty would, as a rule, be men of action and adventure rather than dilettanti and lovers of the beautiful; for the first few years of their reigns they would be too busily engaged with the problems of war and the final destruction of their foes to be able to devote much time to art or the improvement of the imperial collections. These may be some of the reasons why it is so often possible to distinguish the wares of one dynasty from those of another; and they also help to account for the fact that where there is continuity of design the reproductions are invariably inferior to the originals from which they were copied.

It has been said that the ancients did not distinguish clearly between the various metals, and that their bronze often contained a quantity of gold or silver, and so was of superior quality. On the contrary, from what we know of them, it would seem as if they had very definite ideas about the various metals, and took great care in the choice of them. This largely accounts for the superiority of the things they made. On the famous Hsüan Yüan mirrors it is stated that the materials used in their manufacture were refined one hundred times, while from the inscription on certain Han mirrors we learn that they were made from *shan t'ung* 善銅, or good copper, from Tanyang,<sup>2</sup> which, according to the *Chin Shih So*, was specially suitable for the manufacture of mirrors, and was in reality third class gold.

We feel sure that no one who has seen the wonderful gold and silver inlay work on some of the early bronzes will say that the men of that time knew little about the precious metals or were reckless in their use of them.

Another interesting fact to be noted is that the division of the past into dynastic periods is not so unequal as it would appear at first sight, and a glance at the accompany-

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<sup>2</sup> A town in the province of Kiangsu on the Shanghai-Nanking Railway.

ing table will show that the normal length of a dynasty was about 300 years.

Han Dynasty	.	206 B.C.—A.D. 220	.	.	426 years
T'ang	„	.	A.D. 617- 906	.	290 „
Sung	„	.	A.D. 960-1280	.	320 „
Ming	„	.	A.D. 1368-1643	.	276 „
Ch'ing	„	.	A.D. 1644-1911	.	267 „

The great gap in the above table is the period A.D. 220-617 when there were a number of short lived dynasties, while the Ch'in lasted only forty-three years and the Yüan ninety-nine. In spite of these exceptions we cannot overlook the fact that of the five chief dynasties, omitting the Chou, which was before the Christian era, the longest lasted less than 450 years and the shortest more than 250 years.

The assigning of a mirror to a particular dynasty is not, as a rule, a very difficult matter, for each period has its own peculiar types and designs, and there is doubt only when the mirror is of an unusual kind, or when the design has been handed down from a previous dynasty.

For our knowledge in such matters we are indebted firstly to diagrams and descriptions in books, generally those dealing with antiques, but histories and similar works may sometimes give us useful information.

Secondly much can be learnt from the inscriptions, and when these give the actual date of manufacture or have on them the maker's name, the task is easy, but in other cases the deciding factor may be the style of the script or the form of the phraseology. For instance the *Chin Shih So* gives an illustration of a mirror and points out that the inscription refers to the melting of weapons, an event that took place in the Sui Dynasty, and so the mirror can be assigned to that period.

The last, but not the least valuable source of information is tradition, which plays so important a part in the knowledge of the East. The descriptions given in the books are often incomplete, and much of what we



*Locality* : HUEIHSIEN

4.—CH'IN MIRROR OF THE "SILKWORM" TYPE

These are amongst the earliest of what are called Ch'in mirrors.



Diameter 5-in.  
Locality : LOYANG

Author's Collection  
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

### 5.—HSIN (WANG MANG) "GOOD COPPER" MIRROR

DESCRIPTION : The centre square enclosing the knob contains twelve nipples alternating with the duodenary Cycle of Symbols. Beyond are eight nipples two to each T, representing probably the eight periods of the year. In the animal zone *shou tai* 署台 appear the four supernatural animals, *Ssu Ling* 四靈, one to each quadrant (*kung*) of the 28 Constellations or Stellar Mansions (*hsu*) of the Chinese Uranoscope. The animals representing the four quadrants are the Sombre Warrior 玄武 (a Tortoise and the Serpent) in the north, the Azure Dragon 青龍 in the east, the Red Bird 朱雀 in the south, and the White Tiger 白虎 in the west. In between these animals appear a kneeling goat, a snake, a bird and another unrecognizable animal. The field of this zone is further decorated with curls.

Enclosing the animal zone is the belt of 42 rhyming characters. Beyond this lie three concentric belt ornaments with the tooth-comb design, the dog or saw-teeth pattern, and the running cloud pattern.

(Continued at foot of next page)

accept as fact has been handed down from one generation of collectors to another.

The period about which least is known is that of the Liu Chao or Six Dynasties, A.D. 222-589. Though a number of mirrors, including some of the dated ones, are now classed as Liu Chao, and others as Chin or Sui, it is evident that the list is far from complete, especially when we remember that the gilt figures of the Pei Ch'i and Sui periods are quite distinctive, and much prized by collectors, while the clay figures of the Wei and Sui periods are well known and can be distinguished from those of the Han and T'ang times. Such being the case we can argue that even in those times of unrest there must have been changes in the designs and manufacture of mirrors, but we must await the verdict of scientific and systematic research before we can solve many of the problems before us.

INSCRIPTION: The 42 characters form a rhyming inscription of six lines with seven characters to each line.

家朱八左和新  
尙爵子龍以有  
大玄九右銀善  
富武孫虎錫同  
宜順治掌清出  
君陰中三且丹  
王陽央彭明陽

In the time of Hsin<sup>1</sup> good bronze (mirrors) was produced at Tanyang, When mixed with silver and tin it looks clear and bright. Around its four sides dragons stand on the left and tigers on the right. The eight sons and nine grandsons are placed in the centre, The Red Bird and the Sombre Warrior<sup>2</sup> both follow the *yin yang* principles. May your house have everlasting prosperity and still receive the Emperor's beneficence.

<sup>1</sup>Hsin 新 is the name for Wang Mang 王莽, a usurper of the Han Dynasty who reigned from A.D. 8 to 23.

<sup>2</sup>The Red Bird and the Sombre Warrior are names given to the Southern and Northern Quadrants of the Chinese Uranoscope.

The character for 4 is written 三 instead of the usual form 四; 冶 (melt, fuse) is written as 治 (in); 雀 (bird) is written as 爵; 常 (everlasting) is written as 尙.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAPES, SIZES AND VARIATIONS IN THE KNOB OR BOSS

THE earliest known mirrors, namely those of the Emperor Hsüan Yüan, were, according to their Sung reproductions, shaped somewhat like a leaf, with the knob near the top. Some of the reputed Chou mirrors were square, but as far as we know all the Ch'in ones were round, and the same may be said of the majority of those made during the Han period, though there were also some odd and freakish shapes, one kind being in the form of a bell.

According to the *Ke Chih Ching Yüan*, or "Enquiry into the Origin of Things," round mirrors were supposed to represent the heavens and were the best, while the square ones, shaped after the earth,<sup>1</sup> were the worst; those fashioned after the *ling hua* 菱花, or caltrop, and the eight-sided ones were of medium quality. A large number of T'ang mirrors are many sided, some have their edges crimped, while there are a few square ones. A mirror so shaped is easier to hold than a round one, but it is not known if this was the cause of the changes in shape, or whether they were merely due to the artist seeking a new design. However, round mirrors would be more suitable for putting into the half moon stands in which they were often placed.

Mirrors vary greatly in size and weight: many are four to five inches in diameter, while there are also some very small ones, which, like their counterparts of the present day, were carried about by the ladies and used when needed.<sup>2</sup> The smallest I know of is of the T'ang period and is less than an inch in diameter. It is impossible to give the size of the largest mirror ever

<sup>1</sup> The old Chinese idea was that the earth is square and the heavens round.

<sup>2</sup> In Sir Aurel Stein's book, *Innermost Asia*, there are illustrations of ladies' toilet-cases of the T'ang period in which are mirrors and other articles.





DIAMETER 4-in.  
Locality : YENLING

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

6.—CH'IN MIRROR WITH ARC BORDER  
and intricate pattern in the background. The knob is fluted.

DESCRIPTION : On a low network of lozenged compartments inscribed with spirals and curvilinear triangles, and lined with dots, are four cranes or phoenixes in pairs. One Chinese author describes the "phoenix as resembling a wild swan before, and a unicorn behind . . . with neck of a snake, the tail of a fish, the forehead of a crane, the vaulted back of a tortoise" (Williams : *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism*).

The fluted knob rests on the field design and is framed by a broad flat band which like the arc circles has a scooped edge.



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

Courtesy of E. M. B. INGRAM

Locality: WEISHUI, S. of Kaifengfu

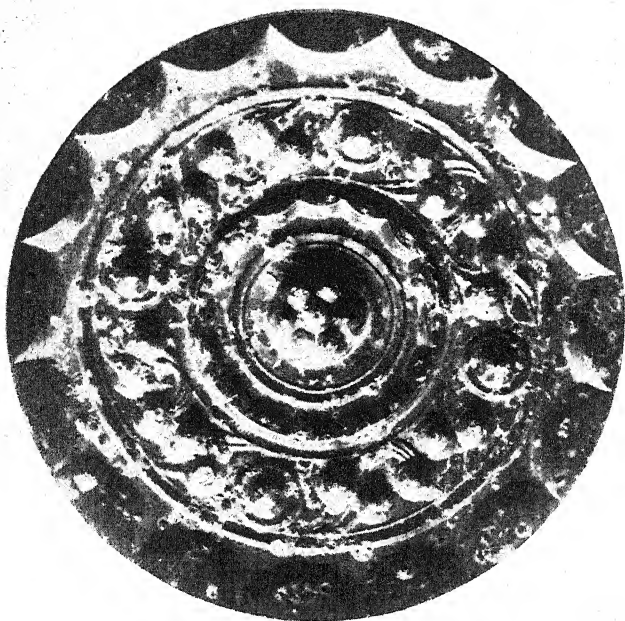
#### 7.—CH'IN MIRROR WITH ARC BORDER

Flower decoration and intricate ground design

DESCRIPTION: Twelve segments with scooped edges frame the field laid out uniformly with a die ( $\frac{5}{8}$  by  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch in size). The knob rests directly on the field and is enclosed in a broad undecorated band with an outer rope design. At mid-distance is a circle, drawn as though to help the artisan to place in true symmetry the four quatrefoils.

In the *Shih King* or Book of Odes which is probably the most authentic of the Confucian books, the virtues of T'ai Ssü, wife of Wen Wang are referred to in the couplet:

"Ye winged locusts you live in harmonius clusters, you deserve a numerous posterity." From this written record we see how early the locust was symbolic of fecundity and harmony. In art it is represented by the *ch'an wen* pattern of the insects with folded wings, which is the main field decoration of this mirror.



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{4}$ -in.  
*Locality* : LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

8.—HAN "HUNDRED NIPPLES" MIRROR  
 with peaked boss

DESCRIPTION : Peaked central knob with six raised leaves or petals. The main design consists of four quadrant nipples, and running tendrils studded with smaller nipples. Festoons of sixteen raised arcs appear on the inner circle and outer edge of the mirror.

T'ai Ssu in the Book of Odes is praised as the mother of a hundred sons. Legge says : " We are not to suppose that T'ai Ssu had herself a hundred sons. She had ten, and her freedom from jealousy so encouraged the fruitfulness of the harem that all the sons born in it are ascribed to her." These hundred sons have been represented in art under the name of *i pai tzu* or hundred nipples. By 'hundred,' the Chinese wish to convey the meaning of 'many.'



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{8}$ -in.

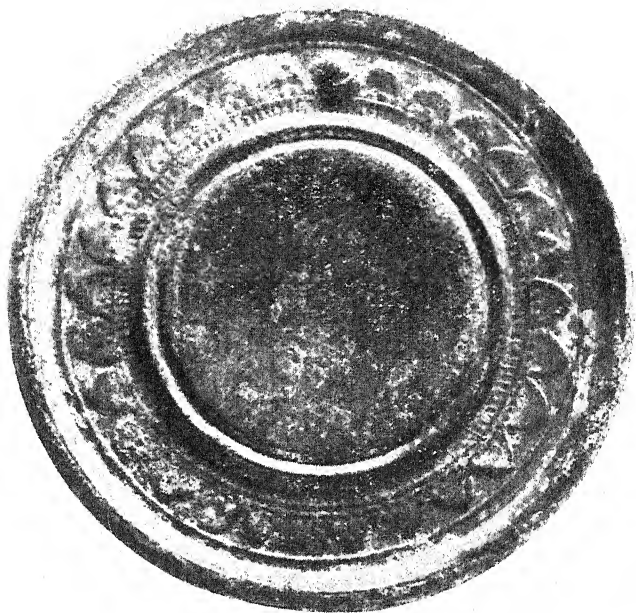
*Locality* : LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

Author's Collection

#### 9.—T'ANG MIRROR WITH SIX KNOBS

DESCRIPTION : Note the lotus leaf motif so frequent in the T'ang Period, when Buddhism flourished in China. As the lotus rears its beautiful flowers high above the water and the mud where lie its roots, so the Buddhists saw in it a symbol of spiritual elevation of man above his dross nature.



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{4}$ -in.

Author's Collection  
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

10.—T'ANG MIRROR WITH ECCENTRIC KNOB



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{8}$ -in.

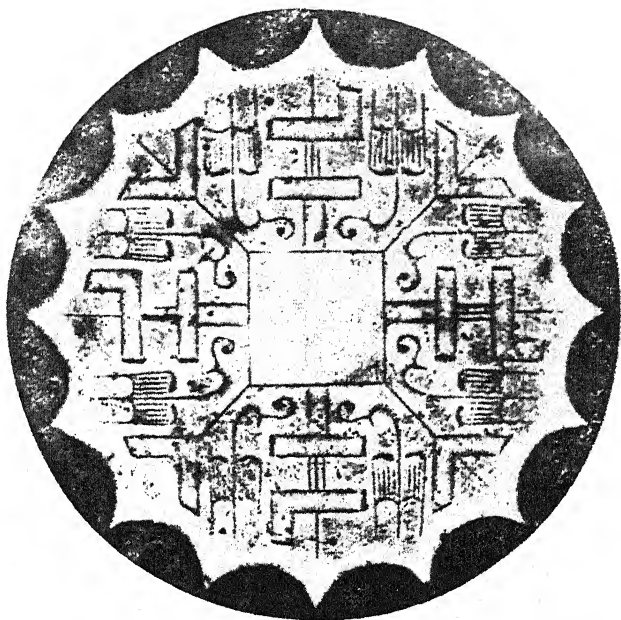
Photo by J. M. PLUMER  
By courtesy of M. F. FARLEY

# 11.—MIRROR OF HUAI VALLEY PERIOD

Early type of TLV design

Most mirrors of this type come from Showchow in Anhwei Province, though a few have been found in the neighbourhood of Hsianfu, also at Loyang and other parts of Honan.

DESCRIPTION: The knob is fluted and is enfolded by two elongated dragon spirals. The rectangle contains an inscription typical of the period and similar to those translated from other mirrors. Into the main field projects the TLV design, fluted. Four dragons and compound spirals in high relief decorate this zone.



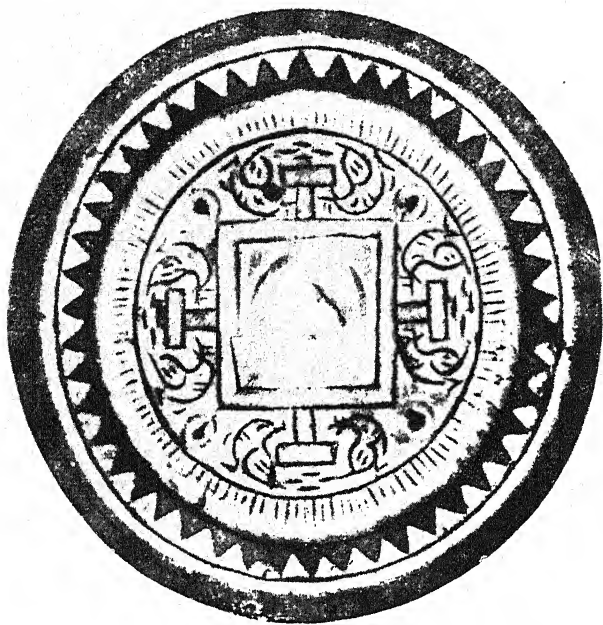
Diameter 5-in.

Rubbing

*Locality* : LOYANG

12.—HAN “Jih Kuang” 日光 OR SUNLIGHT MIRROR  
with arc border, “Double Bird” and TLV decorations

DESCRIPTION : Eight open winged birds are placed symmetrically in the equal divisions made by the square rules, T's and L's and arcs.



Diameter 3-in.

Locality: YENLING

### 13.—HAN MIRROR

Variation of TLV design with Quails

In the *Book of Odes*, the quail and magpie are given as models of marital conduct :

“ The quails go in couples  
 The magpies in pairs. . . .  
 A man without goodness  
 Shall he be my Lord ? ”

See M. GRANET, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, pp. 34, 35.



produced, for many of the stories in this connection are obviously exaggerations. In the *Chin Shib So* there is an illustration of one that was one foot five inches (Han measurement),<sup>3</sup> in diameter and weighed 16 pounds.

This is an abnormal size however, and a 10-inch mirror is considered to be a very large one. A mirror of this size when in use would either be hung on the wall or placed on a stand. Some of the largest ones were probably used for fortune-telling, or as a protection against evil influences rather than for humbler and more mundane purposes.

Most mirrors have a knob in the centre with a hollow running through it, so that, if desired, the mirror can be hung up or attached to a person's belt, or held in the hand by means of a cord. The knobs vary much in size, shape and design, and often help to tell us the age or period of the mirror. For instance almost all the knobs on Ch'in mirrors are fluted, and this peculiarity is also seen in a few Han pieces; the largest ones are found on some of the Han mirrors which were gifts expressing a wish for the prosperity of a person's descendants. In certain specimens the knobs are shaped like axe-heads, so as to be able to beat off any evil forces that may be about, while a spice of variety is added when they are in the form of turtles or other animals, this being especially noticeable in the "Seahorse and Grape" type. Another peculiar knob seen in some Han pieces is that of a central cone surrounded by several smaller ones, the design being supposed to represent the sun and the planets.

The knob is frequently broken or damaged, and when buying mirrors special care should be taken to see that it is intact.

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<sup>3</sup> A Han foot is supposed to be the same as a carpenter's, namely  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches, though a Han jade foot-rule which I have seen measured only  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

## CHAPTER V

### DESIGNS AND DECORATIONS

THE subject of designs and decorations on mirrors is a very complicated one, and almost requires a separate treatise to itself, even if we leave aside for the present the characters and inscriptions found on many of them. The first thing to be remarked is the number and diversity of types in existence, and it is a fairly easy matter to make a collection of a hundred and fifty to two hundred mirrors all different from one another, and, if we allow for variations of size and differences of detail, this number may be very largely increased.

Certain designs and symbols occur fairly frequently, not only in a large number of mirrors, but also over a long period, and it is on these rather than on the strange and unusual ones that our interest is to be concentrated. There are mirrors which have no design or decoration on them, but they are comparatively few in number.

It is also necessary to remember that while on some mirrors one pattern covers the whole of the surface, in others the decorations on the border and the outer rims are quite different from those on the inside, and also from those round the knob. This is especially noticeable in many Han mirrors, where there may be two or three different designs running round the outer edge, each distinct from the other. One prominent rim design is the "arc circle," which is a feature of a number of Ch'in mirrors. It is also used as an inner decoration and sometimes is even seen round the knob. Its popularity is such that it is also found on many Han mirrors of the "Congratulatory and Good Luck" type, sometimes occurring two or three times on the same mirror.

The "running cloud pattern" is frequently to be found on the outer part of Han and Liu Chao mirrors, and is often associated with circles of the "water" and the



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

*Locality*: SHOWCHOW

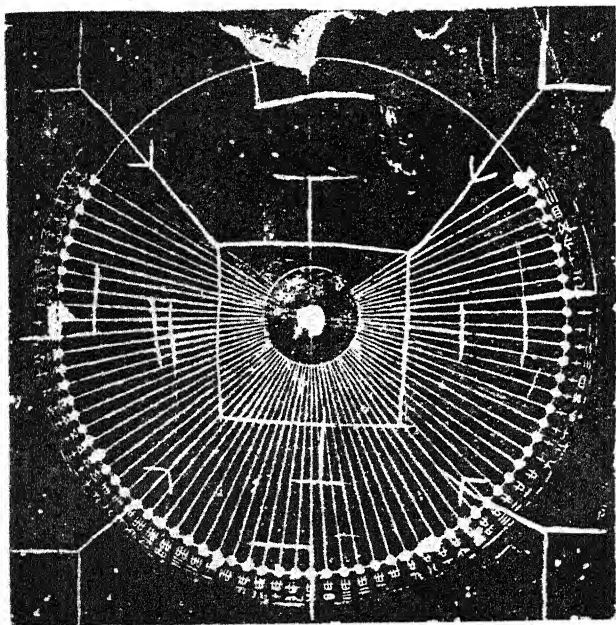
By courtesy of J. JAVROTSKY

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

14.—MIRROR OF HUAI VALLEY PERIOD

with four 卐 *Shan* or T decoration

Black enamel mirror very similar in design to Ch'in mirrors found at Loyang.



By courtesy of Dr. H. Mueller, Peking

15.—STONE ASTRONOMICAL INSTRUMENT  
from the T'uan Fang Collection showing TLV symbols

“dog-teeth” symbols. The two latter have of course been known since the very earliest times and are by no means peculiar to China. Of more obscure origin are the circular bands of short strokes or lines, and known as the “rope” pattern, the explanation being that they are supposed to represent rays of light.

Coming to the inner decorations we must first discuss the *wan tzu t'ou* 卐字頭, or “meandering” design. It is seen in various forms on a number of old bronzes even as far back as the Shang period, but in some of the early mirrors it is cut up into what are known as the TLV shapes. A great deal of interest has been aroused by the accidental likeness of these three signs to certain letters of our alphabet, but an examination of the designs on the bronzes and also on certain mirrors will, I think, prove that they are merely parts of the meandering pattern. Dr. H. Mueller, of Peking, the well-known archaeologist, contends however, that they have an astronomical significance and has kindly given me a photograph of an old stone from the Tuan Fang Collection which has the appearance of an astronomical instrument, and on which the signs appear. Unfortunately, there are no records left explaining the uses of these ancient instruments, otherwise the learned doctor might have little difficulty in proving to us the truth of his theory with regard to these interesting signs. Bishop White, is of the opinion that these signs represent geometrical angles of precision and are connected with the old idea that the earth is square.

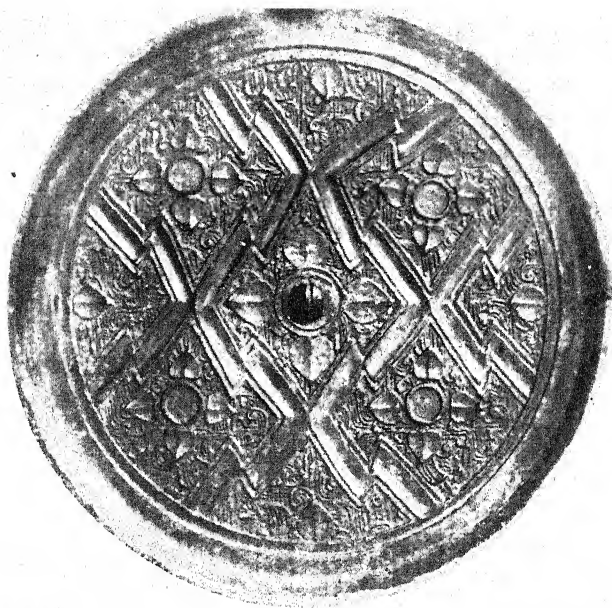
Mr. Karlbeck ascribes to them a technical origin. Examination of early mirrors with a uniform design on the background shows that they were laid out with a rectangular die repeating the motif until the field was covered. It was to cover the ridges raised between the successive imprints of the die, that geometrical forms of T's, L's and V's were impressed: the V appearing where the circular band of the edge cut across the ridges of the corner rectangles.

The symbol T especially seems to have caught the imagination of the Ch'in artists, and some of the very finest mirrors of that time have four of these so-called capital letters as their chief decoration, and it would be difficult to imagine anything handsomer or more effective. A suggestion that the popularity of the symbol is due to its likeness to the Chinese character *shan* 山 (mountain) is probably true, though a few mirrors have lately come to light in which capital L and V are the main feature of the design. Illustrations Nos. 17 and 18 which show two remarkable mirrors, one with five T's and another with six T's, prove conclusively that the T symbol is merely part of the meandering design, the length of the middle stroke dispelling the idea that the character 山 was indicated. The illustrations in the book, *Croix et swastika en Chine*, by Louis Gaillard, s.j., and in Prof. Umehara's *Etude sur le miroir antérieur à la dynastie des Hans* (notably plates 18, 27, 29, 35), also prove without a doubt that the TLV signs are merely parts of the *wan tzu t'ou*, and have no special significance of their own.

The TLV signs are a prominent feature on some of the very best Han mirrors, including those made at the Imperial factory, and are also to be found on a number of Sung reproductions. It is difficult to account for their continual appearance, but it is unlikely that they had any special significance, and would seem to have been used solely for decorative purposes, or for making the design appear more complete and uniform.<sup>1</sup>

As mythological forms and subjects play so important a part in Chinese art it is not surprising that they should be often seen on mirrors. The phoenix vies with the dragon as first favourites and they appear in every conceivable form and fashion. Sometimes they are little more than strange fantastic objects, difficult even to recognize, but on other occasions they come out in their full glory, especially on some of the larger T'ang pieces. When

<sup>1</sup> Symbols or signs used to add uniformity to a design are called by the Chinese *kuei chü* 規矩, "custom." Into this class they put the TLV signs.



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

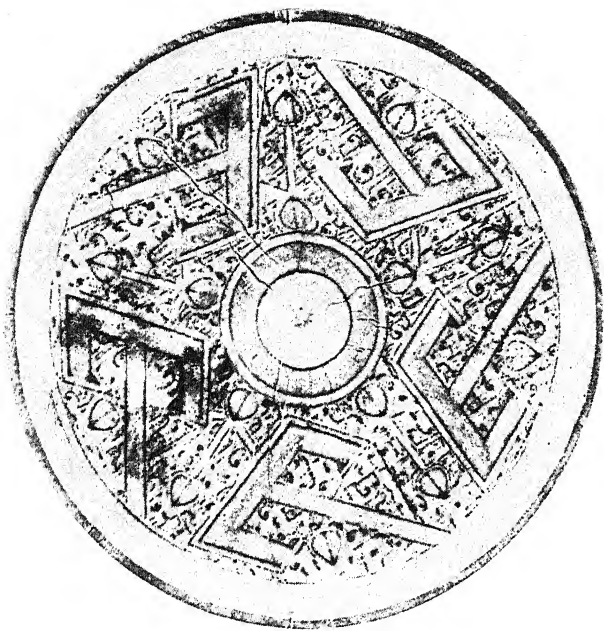
Formerly in Author's Collection

#### 16.—MIRROR OF HUAI VALLEY PERIOD

##### Variation of the TLV design

DESCRIPTION: The field of the mirror is divided by open V's or chevrons into nine compartments, five of which carry a floral design. The small empty circles were possibly set with precious stones or coloured glass or left open to be inscribed with four symbols. The background is filled in with clawlike curls and rows of dots.

We can well imagine the preparation of the moulds of these mirrors with a number of simple dies, somewhat like those of our modern bookbinder, which in the hands of an inspired artist give the most unexpected and puzzling combinations of figures in the Ch'in and Han periods.



Diameter  $6\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

Rubbing

Locality : SHOWCHOW

Courtesy of HAROLD PORTER, C.M.G.

# 17.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

showing five T's or 山 *Shan*

DESCRIPTION OF MIRRORS 17 AND 18 : Among the categorical numbers of the Chinese, five and six have a wide attribution of subjects from the earliest days of history. There are five Guardian Mountains ; five points of the compass : *Chung* or Centre being added to our four points ; five Tenures of the Empire under Yao ; the five elements : water, fire, wood, metal, earth ; five metals : gold, silver, copper, tin and iron ; five mountain ranges forming the southern boundary of the Empire at the accession of the Ch'in Dynasty ; the five planets ; etc.





Diameter  $7\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

Locality: SHOWCHOW

Rubbing

Courtesy of HAROLD PORTER, C.M.G.

# 18.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

showing six T's or 山 *Shan*

According to Mayer's valuable "Chinese Reader's Manual" there are: the six limits of space comprising in addition to the four cardinal points, the zenith or heaven and the nadir or earth; the six Breaths or influences of Heaven deriving from the *Yin Yang* principle; the Six States in alliance during the third century B.C.; the Six Ministers of Huang Ti; the six stations of the Hexagram, etc.

These two mirrors are ornated with leaves on a background of scrolls. The tops of the T's of Mirror 18 are lodged against the sides of a six-pointed star traced in a gouged line. The legs of the T are slanted away to make place for the six leaves pointing inwards opposed to the six leaves turning outwards from the seat of the knob.



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{4}$ -in.  
*Locality*: LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

19.—T'ANG MIRROR  
with the *Hai-ma P'u-f'ao* or "Sea-horse and Grape" design

they appear together they are symbolical of the Emperor and Empress.

The twelve cyclical animals are another common feature, sometimes appearing in name only round the centres of the mirror, but on other occasions they may be seen following each other round the outer rim. The unicorn is often prominent, as well as the bat, which is said to bring good fortune because the latter part of its name *pien fu* 蝙蝠 has the same sound as the word *fu* 福 meaning "happiness," a somewhat far fetched quip, but sufficient to make "the bat in the cloud" decoration a very common one, especially on some of the smaller Ch'in mirrors. The gecko is another favourite of the designers as it is supposed to kill scorpions.<sup>2</sup>

On some of the early Han pieces grotesque human figures are to be seen as well as animals and birds, and they have been referred to as spirit men, who wander round the world. The famous Four Friends, the *Ssu Yu* 四友 of the Ch'in Dynasty, sometimes appear seated and playing their musical instruments, while on certain of the rarer Han specimens there are elaborate scenes depicting the life and movement of the Court.

In the *Hai-ma P'u-i'ao* 海馬葡萄,<sup>3</sup> or "Sea-horse and Grape" type, a high standard of draughtsmanship is revealed, and the objects are much more lifelike, for, though it may at times be difficult to tell the exact species of the animals in the centre, there is no doubt about the vines or clusters of grapes, while little fault can be found with the appearance of the birds or the insects. Sometimes the birds predominate and take up the whole of the mirror.

According to Laufer these mirrors with designs of grapes, sea animals, horses, lions, birds and insects cannot be as early as the Han Dynasty as described by

<sup>2</sup> The gecko is a kind of lizard that frequents lighted ceilings and windows and eats flies, moths, etc. It is also supposed to be able to kill scorpions, one of the "five" poisonous creatures of Chinese animal-lore.

<sup>3</sup> *Hai* 海, "sea" here probably means foreign or from across the sea. At the present day *yang* 洋 ocean, is often used to designate things of foreign origin.

the *Po Ku T'u*, but are probably pre-T'ang of the fifth and sixth centuries, and are due to Persian influence, as the composition of this decoration first appears in the Sassanian art of Persia. This is supported by Japanese authorities and also by our knowledge of Central Asia of that period through Sir Aurel Stein's discoveries.

Flowers do not occupy a prominent place in the earlier types but are the chief features of some of the finest T'ang pieces.

A form of decoration to which considerable importance seems to be attached by the Chinese is the *ju* 乳 or "nipple,"<sup>4</sup> and mirrors are often named after the number of nipples on them. Sometimes they are quite numerous, and take the form of an animal or a flower.

The decorations round the knob are of importance and must not be passed unnoticed. A very popular form is the *ling hua* 菱花, or caltrop, and this design is also known as the *yün chien* 雲肩 or "embroidered collar," which was formerly worn on ceremonial occasions. In some cases bats take the place of the flowers. An unusual type is where the knob is surrounded by a circle of flat nipples that rise just above the surface, and there are other cases where it seems to be the central cone of a number of mountain peaks (see illustration 8). Outside the decorations round the knob there is usually a circle or a square in which may be some characters or simple designs.

The signs and symbols used in the decoration of mirrors belong to certain categorical numbers of Chinese literature and mythology as well as to their astronomical system. Their zodiac contains 28 stellar constellations or mansions (*hsü*) divided into FOUR quadrants (*kung*), which are represented by the tortoise or Sombre Warrior in the North, the Azure or Green Dragon in the East, the Red Bird or Vermillion Phoenix in the South, and the White Tiger in the West. FIVE refers to the five regions: North, South, East, West and Centre; the five

<sup>4</sup> The nipple is held in respect as something which helps to sustain life, and a number of these on a mirror are looked upon as aids to longevity.



Diameter  $5\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

*Locality* : LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

20.—T'ANG MIRROR

with flower design and crouching animal knob



Diameter  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -in

Locality : LOYANG

Courtesy of F. M. B. INGRAM

## 21.—HAN "SHANG FANG" OR IMPERIAL FACTORY MIRROR

with rolling cloud and dog-teeth borders and an inscription about the spirit man who roams all over the world

DESCRIPTION : The base of the knob is decorated with a caltrop design, *ling hua* 菱花, affecting the shape of bats (*pien fu*) emblematic of happiness. The field of the mirror between the circle of characters and inner square is divided by the TLV motifs set off with eight nipples, into eight compartments one for each of the eight periods of the year (the commencement of Spring, vernal equinox, commencement of Summer, Summer solstice, commencement of Autumn, Autumnal equinox, commencement of Winter, Winter solstice). The four supernatural animals appear here, each in its quarter, the Sombre Warrior in the North corresponding to Winter; opposite in the

(Continued at foot of next page)

elements or primordial Essences (Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, Earth); the five metals; the five planets; the five sacred mountains; the five blessings.<sup>5</sup> SEVEN refers to the seven Luminaries or Rulers of the Times and Seasons (the sun, the moon and the five planets). EIGHT corresponds to the eight periods of the year; the Diagrams or *Pa Kua* of triple lines; the eight Taoist Immortals or *Pa Hsien*. NINE to the nine tripods of Yu; the nine fields of Heaven (the sun, the moon and seven stars of the Great Bear constellation); the nine similitudes.<sup>6</sup> TWELVE to the twelve branches or Han duodenary cycle of symbols which in combination with the ten "stems" formed the cycle of sixty (corresponding to our computation by century); the twelve divisions of the Ecliptic; the twelve

<sup>5</sup> *Fu wu fu chih shou* 符五福之壽, "to be worthy of the five blessings": *shou*, old age; *fu*, wealth; *ke'ang-ming*, health; *yu hao te*, love of virtue; *kao chung ming*, a long life.

<sup>6</sup> *Chiu ju* 九如, "the nine similitudes" often used in expressing good wishes include, *ju-shan* like a mountain, as constant as the moon, as high as the sun, as durable as the Southern Mountain, as luxuriant as pine and cypress leaves, etc.

South or Summer is the Red Bird. East and West lie the Azure Dragon and the White Tiger with this particularity that they are confronting two small discs emblematic of the Sun and Moon *jih yueh* 日月. The other compartments are taken up by a hare or rat and the winged spirit man, a bird with a raised wing, a deer and another animal. Four quails and numerous curls fill the rest of this animated zone. The slanting comb-teeth, saw-teeth and running cloud pattern in three concentric belts enframe this beautiful mirror.

INSCRIPTION:

尙方佳竟真大好  
上有仙人不知老  
渴飲玉泉飢食棗  
浮游天下數四海  
壽敵金石如國保

The Mirror made in the Imperial Factory is really of the finest quality, On it is a genii who never grows old. When thirsty he drinks from the Jade Spring, and when hungry he eats dates. He rambles over the world and roams within the Four Seas. His longevity is enduring like metal or stone, This mirror is to be kept like a National Treasure.

作 *ts'o*, to make, is written as 佳; 鏡 *ching*, mirror, is written in its abbreviated form 竟; 遨 *ao*, to ramble, is written in its abbreviated form 數.

cyclical animals. TWENTY-FOUR for the twenty-four yearly festivals.

A great many of the descriptions and explanations given in the early Sung catalogues of antiques may be only partially true, as a great mythology had by then arisen round these antiques and decorative motifs, which at the time of manufacture were ritual remains of an even earlier religious tradition.

From the very earliest times the Chinese have had a dualist vision of the world which has decided much of the symbolism of their art. Chinese Cosmogony revolved round the *yin yang* harmony of nature, male and female, from which springs life, the alternance of day and night, the opposition of sun and moon, of heat and cold. We find constantly the expression of this on mirrors. The tortoise and the serpent, the dragon and the phoenix (*lung feng*), the sun and moon, heaven and earth (the circle and square).

The earliest figure of Chinese mythology is P'an Ku, the maker of the universe, offspring of those dual powers of nature. He is represented as a dwarfish man with two horns in his head, a hammer and chisel in his hands, dressed in bearskin or leaves. May we not identify with P'an Ku the spirit man which we find with the four supernatural animals on certain mirrors?

It is almost impossible to say which period can claim the best designs and the finest mirrors. Some of the Ch'in pieces are strangely beautiful and display workmanship of the highest order, but the *Han Shang Fang* or Han Imperial factory mirrors are also worthy of our admiration, with their wonderful border decorations and intricate general design; they are closely followed by the more common "Sunlight" mirrors, and the *Chang Fu Kuei* 長富貴 or "Continual Prosperity" type, which are very handsome and which have striking and original designs.

Yet there may be others who declare, and not without reason, that nothing can surpass a T'ang mirror when it portrays galloping horsemen, or a pair of birds in flight.





Diameter  $4\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

*Locality:* LOYANG

22.—T'ANG MIRROR

decorated with Flying Horsemen and Females on Cranes riding  
through the Clouds



Diameter  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

By courtesy of HAROLD PORTER, C.M.G.

Locality: NORTH HONAN, some distance south of Changtefu

### 23.—T'ANG MIRROR

with Flying Birds, Dragon and Cassia Tree in the Moon

DESCRIPTION: The dualistic principal of *yin yang* pervades the whole cosmology of the Chinese. Here is the dualism of the Sun and Moon. The Sun is represented by the knob and the moon by the circle and Cassia Tree, the three-legged toad, Shang-chu, and the hare pounding the elixir of life. MAYERS: 957

The association of the Dragon and the Phoenix (*Lung-Feng*) is constant in China: the Dragon emblematic of the male and the Phoenix of the female sex. The Phoenixes here carry in their beaks garlands and the character *Shou* or Longevity. The Sun and Moon in popular Chinese astronomy are also stars (WERNER: *Myths and Legends of China*, Myths of the Stars).

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STORY OF A MIRROR

THE true collector is not content with the mere acquisition of a number of objects, no matter how rare and costly they may be, but is also interested in their origin, their history, and the turns of fortune that have followed them through the ages. For such an enthusiast what can be more interesting than an ancient mirror? Romance radiates from it, and it needs little skill or imagination to make it the centre of a fascinating story, especially if the inscription tells us that it was an Imperial mirror, or if it bears the name of one of the famous makers of the Han Dynasty. Did not the immortal Chu-kuo Liang 諸葛亮, A.D. 181-234, after defeating the state of Ch'u, take back with him one of the mirrors made by the Meng family, and may not the mirror we have just bought have once belonged to one of the old time heroes, or been the treasured possession of some beautiful lady, perhaps even of an empress? At any rate its owner must have been a person of some consequence, for it is truly and wonderfully made, a thing without flaw or blemish, and retaining, even to this day, much of its former lustre and brightness.

All this may be true and the history of our piece of bronze may in fact be more startling than we imagine; yet even at the risk of dulling the fine edge of romance, it may be better to examine it closely and critically, and see if it will not reveal to us some of its secrets.

In the first place it is not difficult to find out whether it was originally used as a looking-glass, or was made for some special ceremony or purpose, because in the olden days there were men known as *mo ching ti* 磨鏡的 or "grinders of mirrors," whose profession it was to make bright again such mirrors that had become dull, or had lost their powers of reflection. I have seen some that have been much worn down by this grinding and

polishing, and so at one time must have been in constant use. Those that show no sign of the grinder's or polisher's art are either of a kind that did not need such treatment, or, as is more likely were not used in the ordinary way, but on account of some supposed magical properties were put into the graves in order to shield the dead from any influences that might tend to disturb their spirits. It is not only from graves, however, that mirrors are recovered, and it is probable that they, together with other family treasures, were often buried during times of war or political unrest, and owing to the subsequent flight or death of their owners were left in their hiding places. Others were doubtless buried under the ruins when a place was destroyed by such acts of violence as flood, or famine, or the revenge of foes. In fact practically all the ancient mirrors now in existence have been recovered from the ground, and had they not been so preserved would most certainly have disappeared through some destructive agency or other. In proof of this we would say that, when looking through the private collections of old Chinese families,<sup>1</sup> it is impossible not to notice the fact that while an occasional Han or even a Chou bronze may be found, it is seldom that there is a mirror of an earlier date than the Sung.

Chinese collectors and experts place a much higher value on articles that have been excavated only a short time (*shēng k'êng ti* 生坑的) than upon those which have never been buried, or which were recovered from the ground many years ago (*shu k'êng ti* 熟坑的). It must be admitted that they are correct in their judgment, for things just dug up are not only more likely to be genuine, but have a brightness and freshness that is absent in those that have been exposed to the air for any length of time. This is specially noticeable in the patina, which seems to flourish best in the dark and damp bowels of the earth. The changes produced in mirrors as well as in other bronze

<sup>1</sup> Many of these collections have been dispersed during the last few years.

objects through long burial in the ground is a matter of great interest and is really only understood by those who have had actual experience in the matter. In this connection the Chinese use the words *k'êng t'ou* 坑頭, which may be broadly translated as "the condition of an object as a consequence of its having been buried in the ground." They also differentiate between the various kinds of soil and their effect upon the things placed in them.

*Tsang k'êng* 髒坑, or "dirt pit," means that the mirror has been discoloured by the action of the soil on it; *jê k'êng* 熱坑, or "hot pit," is the term used when the things seem to have been subjected to heat and the pattern has become blurred. *Shui k'êng* 水坑,<sup>2</sup> or "water pit," is supposed to have a good effect and to produce the finest patina. *Ch'ien k'êng* 鉛坑, "lead pit," and *yin k'êng* 銀坑, "silver pit," are those which give respectively a lead or a silvery appearance to the things placed in them. There are many similar terms, some of them purely localisms, which show that the Chinese have studied the subject carefully, though their generalizations may not always be correct from the purely scientific point of view. This is specially noticeable in the explanations given for the formation of *hei ch'i ku*<sup>3</sup> and of certain chemical actions which take place.

Loyang is not only famous for its *feng-shui* reputed to be the finest in China, but its soil is particularly suited to preserve objects placed in it. This is truly fortunate when we remember that it was the capital of the country during no fewer than six dynasties and the burial ground of many of the most illustrious men of the past.

A few mirrors seem totally unaffected by their long sojourn in the depths of the earth and after a little washing and rubbing are almost like new. It is said that the beautiful black colour known as *hei ch'i ku* 黑漆古 which is found on some mirrors, is due to the action of some chemical

<sup>2</sup> This is probably because the patina is formed very quickly owing to the presence of water or damp soil and so acts as a protective covering to the mirror.

<sup>3</sup> A black enamel-like appearance.

in the soil in which they are buried. This is probably true in some cases, but there seems little doubt that in most instances it is a kind of gun-metal alloy, which was put on the mirrors when they were made. This is supported by the statement in the *Chin Shih So* that some Han mirrors were of a brilliant black colour and were greatly prized. According to Mr. W. P. Yetts the quality of the fine black lacquer-like surface is so perfect and uniform that it could not be accidental, and was probably due to siliceous matter mixed with the layer of the mould which came into contact with the molten metals. Other enamels are of a greenish colour, known as *lu ch'i ku* 綠漆古.

Apart from the actual corrosion or blurring of the design of a mirror caused by the action of the earth on it, —a defect which is often noticeable in some of the later T'ang specimens,—the worst thing that can happen to a mirror is for it to be covered with a kind of copper deposit. Sometimes this takes the form of small specks of copper, but it is also found as a covering over parts of the surface, and is very difficult, in fact almost impossible to remove. Over this deposit is a layer of reddish powder, called by the Chinese "iron rust," but which is really copper oxide, and above this is the patina. Slices of crab apples laid on the mirror and left there for an hour or so will greatly help to remove the "iron rust" but this treatment has little effect on the underlying copper deposit. It is said that this deposit is formed from the daggers and other weapons that are laid on the dead body alongside the mirror. However this may be, it is certain that it detracts greatly from the value of some of the finest specimens, and may even render them almost worthless.

How far a mirror should be cleaned is a matter for the individual judgment, but it must be admitted that the design is of chief importance, and if possible part of this should be made clear, even if it means the loss of some of the patina. The best cleansing agent is cold water, which has little effect on the real patina, and which will,

in the course of time, wash away most of the dirt and other extraneous matter which covers the mirror, though some of the loess or loam deposits are often very difficult to remove in their entirety. I have known some that would not wash off. A strong knife and a good stout brush are also useful in helping to make a mirror clearer and more presentable, but the value of acids and other chemicals is doubtful, and unless used with the greatest care may prove harmful.

A large number of mirrors are cracked or broken, and this is brought about by a variety of causes. Sometimes they are damaged when in the ground owing to the pressure of fallen earth or wood upon them, while others seem to disintegrate because of corrosion or other destructive forces. Another frequent cause of breakage is due to the fact that most of them are dug up by ignorant villagers, whose rough implements and crude methods of excavation will often in the course of a few seconds damage beyond repair things that have lain undisturbed for many centuries, and which cannot be replaced.

The recovery of mirrors and other articles from the ground is generally accomplished in one of three ways: The first is when they are unearthed by peasants while tilling their fields or digging up their land for various purposes such as building houses, or the making of wells,<sup>4</sup> or irrigation ditches. Again, landslides or heavy rains may reveal things that have long been hidden. Sometimes there is great excitement over such finds and it is not unusual for several persons to claim a share in the ownership, leading to disputes and even lawsuits, with the result that the things are as a rule confiscated and only the officials benefit. The country people are also apt to think that everything they find is rare and worth a fabulous sum, and while occasionally they get hold of something really good, the final result generally proves a sad disappointment to their dreams of wealth.

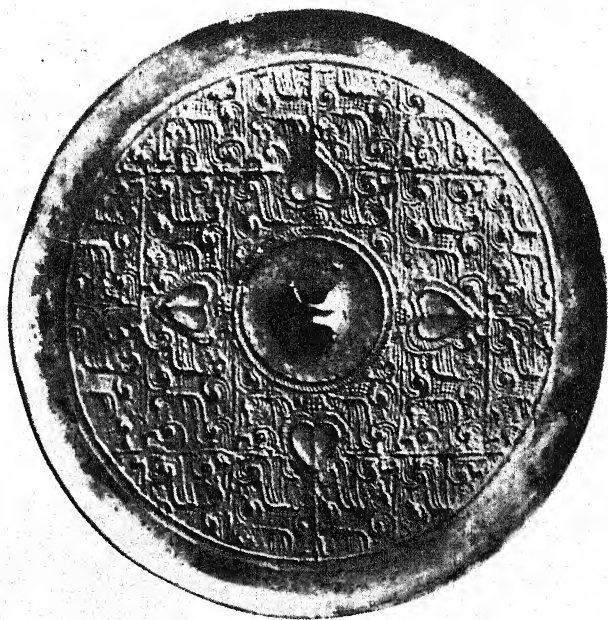
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<sup>4</sup> The famous Hsincheng bronzes were discovered in the year 1923 through the digging of a well.

Public works such as the making of roads, railways, and embankments, also bring to light many of these long hidden treasures, and it was the building of the railway westward from Loyang that first drew the attention of collectors to the remarkable clay figures of the Han, Wei and T'ang dynasties, which were discovered during the making of the roadbed.

Many of the best things, however, are found by people who go in search of them, and who, in spite of the heavy penalties they may incur in case of discovery and conviction, continue to excavate in what they consider favourable places. The great objection to such promiscuous digging is that no record is kept of the things found, or of any facts that might help to identify their previous owners, or the period to which they belong. They are simply taken out and sold as quickly as possible, regardless of the interest they may have for the antiquarian or the historian. Of late years, however, both the Central Government and the local authorities have given attention to this matter, and it is to be hoped that before long all excavations will be made under the supervision of experts, who will see that everything is done in a proper and scientific manner.





Diameter 4-in.

By courtesy of J. JAVROTSKY

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

24.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

*Hei Ch'i Ku* 黑漆鼓, Black enamel type,  
very similar to Ch'in Mirrors from Loyang



Diameter  $6\frac{3}{4}$ -in.

25.—SUNG REPRODUCTION OF A HAN DATED MIRROR  
of the reign of the Emperor Chien An

DESCRIPTION : From the central knob emerge the scaly bodies of two horned dragons and a tiger, studded with nipples. Seven semi-spheres set on plain circular discs or buttons, divide the animal zone into compartments containing the Dragon and Tiger, the Sombre Warrior with attendant Serpent, and Red Bird or phoenix with flapping wings to which reference is made in the inscription. Besides there are the running deer, the goat and kneeling spirit man, and a second spirit man with outstretched arm and wing.

Beyond are five ornated bands, the first with 36 characters of the inscription, the others with the straight tooth-comb, the dog-teeth, and double zigzag or wave patterns.

INSCRIPTION :

建安元年四月造  
○○○○大毋傷  
左龍右虎辟不羊  
朱鳥玄武順陰陽  
長保二親樂福昌  
壽敵金石○○○

Made in the fourth month of the first year of Chien An\*

..... the Great Flawless.

The Dragon on the left and the Tiger on the right repel all bad elements.

The Red Bird and the Sombre Warrior follow the *yin yang* principle of Harmony.

May we see to it that our parents have good fortune and prosperity,

And that they may live as long as the metal and the stone (have everlasting longevity) .....

羊 is an abbreviated form for 祥 (*hsiang*), good. In the second and sixth lines there are missing words.

\* Chien An was one of the last of the Han Emperors, his reign began in the year A.D. 176.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHARACTERS AND INSCRIPTIONS ON MIRRORS

THE presence of characters or an inscription on a mirror may add greatly to its interest and value, but this is not always so, and much depends upon the kind of mirror and the meaning of the words on it.

The most prized ones are those that have on them the year and in some cases also the month of their manufacture. The finest examples of this type were made in the reigns of the Emperors Chien An 建安 of the Han Dynasty and Yüan K'ang 元康 of the Chin Dynasty. Others of special interest have the maker's name on them, or refer to some ceremony or historic person.

As already stated, the first emperor to write an inscription for a mirror was Chou Wu Wang 周武王, but his example does not seem to have been followed by his immediate successors, or at least there is no record of such.

A few Ch'in mirrors have characters on them, but they are of little interest and generally consist of a reference to the brightness of the sun, or some such harmless expression.

In the Han times, however, great attention was paid to the inscriptions and some of them show considerable literary skill. On the *Shang Fang* or Imperial factory mirrors and others of a similar type may often be found the famous allusion to the spirit men who wander round the world (see illustration 21). Many mirrors were produced by certain well-known makers of that age, who were compelled to put their names on their wares, not, as one would suppose, for the purpose of advertisement, but to insure that they would not be mistaken for those made in the Imperial factory.

An inscription of considerable importance is that found on the *shan t'ung* 善銅 or Good Copper Mirrors, which we are told came from Tanyang and which contained silver and tin mixed with copper (see illustration 5).



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

Locality : LOYANG

## 26.—HAN DATED MIRROR

of the *ping sheng* day of the 1st month of the 2nd year of the Emperor Yung Shou (A.D. 155-158)

DESCRIPTION : Coiled Dragons form the knob, set in a curvilinear square with four characters 長宜子孫 (see p. 47) and dots in the corners. Four bats rest on the apexes and in between lie whiskered dragon heads. The belt of the characters is enclosed in a festoon of arcs with tiny bird shapes with a crested dot in each dip. The outer broad band is decorated with lozenged lines with stylized bat forms.



Diameter 4-in.

Locality: YENLING

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

27.—HAN MIRROR WITH “ERH” 而 CHARACTERS

This is a very common type and is known as the *Ming Kuang* 明光,  
or “Bright Light” Mirror

DESCRIPTION OF MIRROR 27: The seat of the knob is enclosed in a field of twelve circular segments, a pattern called *hua wen*.

The inscription is elliptical: the decorative conjunction *erb* 而 appears a number of times. From similar inscriptions of that epoch we can gather its purpose was to compare the brightness of the mirror to the Sun and Moon, its power to reflect inner thoughts or moods, and elevate them to happier ends.

Professor Hirth in an interesting and valuable account of *Chinese Metallic Mirrors*, mentions a similar inscription on one of these so-called magic mirrors, and adds that the character 而 which seems to

而日而月而內而金  
而清而明而照而心

be a mere ornamental expletive—inserted for the purpose of puzzling the reader—stands sometimes for 天 *tien*, heaven.

In commenting on this inscription, Dr. H. A. Giles suggests the following explanation: "The character *erb* 而 has other senses besides the only one quoted by Prof. Hirth. Two of its meanings are *like* = 如, and *thou* = 爾; and with the aid of these two keys we arrive at a very natural and intelligible legend for a magic mirror, to wit:—

"Like the Sun, like the Moon, like water, like gold,  
Be thou clear and bright, and reflect (what is in) thy heart."



Diameter 3-in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

Locality: LOYANG

28.—HAN “CH’ING PAI” 清白, OR CLEAR WHITE MIRROR  
with circle of archaic characters

DESCRIPTION: Between two bands of tooth-comb design, is a belt of archaic characters with simple decorations of romboids and spirals. The simplicity of treatment made this mirror easy to manufacture, so it is quite common. The name *Ch’ing Pai* 清白, “Clear White,” is given to these mirrors because very often these two words are found in the inscription, though not in this particular case.





Diameter  $4\frac{1}{8}$ -in.

*Locality*: LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

29.—HAN “CH’ING PAI” 清白, OR CLEAR WHITE MIRROR  
with circle of archaic characters: a common type of Han Mirror



Diameter 4-in.  
*Locality* : LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

30.—HAN “CH’IEN CH’IU” 千秋: THOUSAND AUTUMNS MIRROR

INSCRIPTION in the inner circle :

日月之光長毋相忘

Like the light of the Sun and the Moon  
 May our memory of each other be everlasting.

The archaic characters in the outer circle are very difficult to decipher.



Diameter 4-in.

Locality : LOYANG

### 31.—T'ANG CH'IN WANG MIRROR

DESCRIPTION : Four running animals in strong rounded relief surround the knob. Round the boss are mythical lions and dogs. Circles of dog-teeth and pearls and a raised ridge separate the animal zone from the belt of 20 characters, the outer edge is decorated with the tooth and wave patterns.

INSCRIPTION :

持	非	判	賞
是	關	不	得
自	欲	惜	秦
明	照	千	王
心	膽	金	鏡

Gladly have I obtained the Ch'in Wang Mirror

for which I would not have grudge a thousand crowns.

It is not my wish that the mirror shall serve the purpose of revealing the gall bladder (evil thoughts)

But that I may reveal myself by holding this to illustrate my own clear conscience.

The inscription refers to Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang. In a book called, 西京雜記 *Hsi Ching Tsa Chi*, "Miscellany of the Western Capital," it is said that he had a square mirror which possessed the magic power of revealing one's heart and bladder. In case any female with a lewd mind was brought before him, her evil intentions would be revealed by the mirror which would show her heart and bladder shaking. With this proof of her wickedness he had her executed.



Diameter 3-in.

Locality: EAST OF KAIFENGU

### 32.—SIX DYNASTIES PRESENTATION MIRROR

A type given as a present to an official, with inner "bat" decoration.

DESCRIPTION: The bat decoration *pian fu* is worked out in various degrees of stylization, topping the four corners of arcs lodging the characters; again within the segments subtended by the four arcs, and in the outer rim where they appear ten times. In Chinese symbolism the "bat" is homonymic with "happiness." The Three Chief Ministers of State under the Chou were: the Grand Tutor, the Grand Assistant and the Grand Guardian. These Ministers stand for the highest rank of officialdom.

INSCRIPTION:

位 至 三 公

"May you attain one of the three orders of Dukedom."

(Three great Ministers of State, literally, three dukes.)



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{8}$ -in.

Locality : LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

### 33.—HAN OR SIX DYNASTIES PRESENTATION MIRROR

A type of mirror given as presentation to an official

DESCRIPTION : The two S-shape motifs seem to be a complicated superimposition of dragons with open mouths (note the two eyes in the NW and SE), of the *ju-i* (scepter of authority), and of halberds.

The word *chi* 戟, halberd, has as homophone 吉, good luck. *Ju-i* means, "according to your wishes."

INSCRIPTION : 君宜高官 *Cchiin i kao kuan*.

"You, Sir, possess the qualifications for a high official post."



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{8}$ -in.

*Locality* : LOYANG

### 34.—HAN PRESENTATION MIRROR

of type given as a present to an official with characters written in  
“hanging needle” style and with bat decorations

DESCRIPTION : From the plain base of the knob project the four  
bat decorations and in the free dips of the arcs are placed the four  
characters of the inscription :

君宜高官

“You, Sir, possess the qualifications for a high official post.”

It was the fashion in those times to use strange and archaic expressions and forms of writing; when these occur the inscriptions are difficult to decipher, and in fact, the real meaning of some of them have puzzled not only the scholars of present day but also those of the Sung and Ming dynasties.

In this connection we may mention a very common kind of mirror on which many of the characters are written somewhat like 而 *erb*, but which may represent 天 *t'ien*, or even be nothing more than a decorative element. They are without influence on the other words, which in many cases fail to make a sentence with any definite meaning. The author of the *Ch'in Shih So* is somewhat perturbed by his inability to explain why this mirror should be so common and suggests that many of them are forgeries. As, however, they are constantly being dug up by the country people in certain districts there seems to be little doubt as to their authenticity (see description of Mirror 27).

Another feature peculiar to Han inscriptions is the occasional substitution of characters of similar sound or form for the real one, while variety is sometimes added by writing them upside down or turning them around. Peculiar styles of penmanship are also to be found, the best known being what they call the "hanging needle" script, while in mirrors wishing prosperity to a person's descendants the "egg-plant" or bulbous form of character may be found. The inscriptions on the "Bright Light" and "Clear White" types of Han mirrors (see illustrations 27, 28, 29, 30) are also very difficult to decipher. The *Ning Shou Chien Ku* 寧壽鑑古 gives a number of illustrations of these mirrors, the inscriptions on which are wholly or partly unintelligible, though judging from the number of these mirrors, the inscriptions must have been at one time very popular. Many of the T'ang mirrors have no inscriptions on them, but there is a very famous one named after Ch'in Wang, the founder of the Ch'in Dynasty which was supposed to possess certain

strange powers which is explained in the description of illustration 31.

A literary curiosity is the *hui wen* 迴文<sup>1</sup> which may be seen on some of the mirrors of the Six Dynasties or Liu Chao period. Its peculiarity is that any one character in the circle may be used as the beginning of the sentence. Amongst the scholars of that time the ability to turn out such things was considered a fine accomplishment and a worthy pastime for their leisure hours.

The characters round the centre of a mirror as a rule show very little originality and the same phrases are to be found over and over again.

The Ch'in designers, probably from reasons of policy,<sup>2</sup> seem to have concentrated their powers upon the artistic rather than the literary effect, and seldom put characters on their mirrors; when they did so they confined themselves to such harmless expressions as

*chien jih chih kuang* 見日之光

*t'ien hsia ta mang* 天下大明<sup>3</sup>

“See the Sun's light, the Earth's great brightness.”

A similar expression is often found on the Han “Sun-light” Mirrors (see illustration 50).

The words on the “Good Luck” and “Congratulatory” mirrors give us an insight into the customs of those times and show that the people favoured the old patriarchal idea that happiness consists largely in the possession of a numerous progeny, for, as we have shown before, the mirrors referring to a person's sons and grandsons appear in considerable numbers.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This was invented by Su Jê-lan 蘇若蘭, a lady who lived in the Fourth Century A.D. She beguiled the hours of separation from her husband exiled to Tartary, by embroidering a poetical palindrome.

<sup>2</sup> As we know the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang put many scholars to death.

<sup>3</sup> Ming was formerly pronounced *mang*.

<sup>4</sup> It was thought that the descendants, not wishing to lose these talismans of good luck, would take great care of them.





Diameter 4-in.

Rubbing  
Locality: LOYANG

### 35.—SIX DYNASTIES PRESENTATION MIRROR

A type given as a present to an official, with characters written in "egg-plant" style and bat decorations

DESCRIPTION: Similar to No. 32 with the addition of four buttons and a festoon of sixteen segments with 16 heads of birds in the dips of the arcs.

The great number of homophones in the Chinese language is a source of inspiration to the Chinese artist. The word *ch'üeh* 雀 for sparrow, small bird, suggests *ch'üeh* 爵, rank, nobility and thus may explain the symbolic presence of sparrows in Chinese decorative art.

INSCRIPTION:

君宜高官

"You, Sir, possess the qualifications for a high official post."



Diameter 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ -in.  
*Locality*: LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

### 36.—T'ANG MIRROR

Illustrating the meeting between Confucius and Jung Ch'i-ch'i at the foot of T'ai Shan, the famous sacred mountain of Shantung

In China, where official rank plays so important a part in the lives and fortunes of the upper classes, it is not surprising to find mirrors on which are the words

*Wei chih san kung* 位至三公

"May you attain one of the Three Orders of Dukedom."

Interest is increased when there are three dots under the character 公, as the wish is then expressed that the recipient may become a Duke of the first grade or order, 公.

On other pieces may be found the words

*Chun i kao kuan* 君宜高官

"You, Sir, possess the qualifications for high official post."

Mirrors intended as birthday presents often have on them characters referring to riches and longevity, and certainly make a pleasing and acceptable gift.

There are many other mirrors that have inscriptions and one of the most prized is known as the Jung Ch'i-ch'i Mirror 榮啓奇鏡. The scene shown on Mirror 36 is a striking one and depicts a meeting between Confucius and Jung Ch'i-ch'i when the former was returning from a visit to the sacred mountain of T'ai Shan. Jung Ch'i-ch'i was playing an instrument and looked so happy that the philosopher was constrained to ask him the reason of his high spirits. The musician replied "I am a human being, I am a man and I have lived to a great age." The inscription on the mirror is as follows:—

榮啓奇問曰答孔夫子

*Jung Ch'i-ch'i wen yueh ta K'ung Fu tzu*

"Jung Ch'i-ch'i questions and answers Confucius."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MIRRORS: PERFECT AND OTHERWISE

EVERY true collector of curios has secrets which he does not reveal even to his best friends. He has things hidden away in dark cupboards and deep boxes which he keeps apart from his own particular treasures, and about whose history he is strangely silent. Some of these are the result of errors of judgment, a disease which at times attacks even the most cautious and experienced buyers, while others were foisted on him by wits that proved sharper than his own. The desire to get something really valuable for a low price often causes us to fall into well laid traps, and when it is too late we discover we have bought a reproduction, or, what is worse still, a clever imitation. Though such memories are sad, there is consolation in the fact that we are in good company, and he is indeed a foolish collector who will not admit his mistakes. The tricksters, the men who make or deal in counterfeit and faked objects, are a pest and a nightmare to all who search for genuine curios, for though we may know their usual methods, and be fully prepared against them, they are continually bringing out new schemes and ideas, and it is then that we may become their victims.

In fact one of the advantages of collecting old mirrors is that it is not difficult, as a rule, to distinguish between the genuine article and the modern imitation. The brightness and clear-cut design, characteristic of the early pieces, is not easy to reproduce, while artificial patina can generally be detected if submitted to a close examination and one or two simple tests. Mr. Karlbeck also points out that many of the ancient mirrors are so thin that they could not be reproduced to-day. The fact that most of these old mirrors can be bought at a comparatively cheap price is their chief protection against the wiles of the forger, and the position is not really serious until we come to

the rarer and more expensive pieces, when great care must be taken, for it has truly been said where there is a demand there will be a supply.

I know of one dealer, whose judgment and experience is unrivalled, who has in his store, though carefully put away, one of the much sought-after dated mirrors of the time of the Chin Emperor Yüan K'ang. It belongs, of course, to that convenient, but often mythical person, a friend who is in need of some ready money, but the pine-trees whisper a sad tale of how the dealer bought it one night from an old countryman after a very hurried examination, for there were many guests in the house, and moreover it did not seem wise to show too keen an interest lest the cupidity of the seller should be aroused. Except that it lacks somewhat in brightness and has a slight flaw in the centre, defects difficult to distinguish in artificial light, it might easily pass unchallenged as a good and true specimen of an ancient and valuable mirror. As a matter of fact the old countryman was but a blind, and the sellers were a clever band of crooks who, in this case, chose as their victim an exceedingly able and competent man. Even he could tell other tales equally sad, but they do not concern us except to show that the search after the old time treasures is full of dangers and pitfalls.

Special care must be taken when buying the *hei ch'i* 黑漆古 or black enamel-like mirrors, for they are often imitated, and the difficulty is greatly increased when the basis of the fraud is a perfectly genuine old mirror, which has been subjected to a process which gives it a beautiful black appearance though somewhat lacking in lustre.

It is only natural that the famous *chin k'e* 金壳, or gold-covered mirrors, should attract the attention of the counterfeiters. In the best imitations the mirror used is a genuine one, but the cover, though of real gold, was not originally part of the mirror, but has been put on recently. The expert relies largely upon the colour of the gold, while the slightest flaw in the workmanship will help to expose the fraud, for the original mirrors were

most exquisitely and wonderfully made. The patina, which is sometimes put on the imitation pieces in order to cover up any defects in workmanship, especially at the places where the metals meet, must be carefully examined and will often help to reveal the truth. What has been said about the gold-covered mirrors applies equally to the *yin k'e* 銀壳, or silver covered ones, and also the *liu chin* 鍍金, or gilt ones. To those who wish to buy any of these precious things we would say as Punch did to those about to marry, "Don't," unless, of course, the purchase is made through a reliable dealer, and the history of the piece is known.

A rather clumsy fraud, and one not difficult to detect, is when a copper cover is put over the mirror and then burnt, in the hope that the changed colour will make it look like gold. From the fact that some of these imitations seem to have been made many years ago, and are covered with iron rust and patina, it would seem as if the trick were an old one, and may have been more successful in the past than it is to-day.

Apart from the question of imitations, however, great care must be taken when buying mirrors: they should be rung to see if there are any cracks in them, for patina, skilfully applied, will hide many a break or flaw and also cover up signs of the dreaded copper deposit, which ruins so many valuable specimens. The really clever workmen who mend or restore old bronzes do not use artificial patina, but that taken from useless or broken pieces; they can even take the knob, or part of one mirror, and put it into another one in such a way that the substitution is very difficult to detect; while they mend broken pieces so skilfully that only a very careful examination will reveal the fact that the mirror is not a perfect one. A little mud or clay smeared over the surface will hide any little deficiencies that may exist, but this is a clumsy method and does not appeal to the artists in deception. As a matter of fact the real condition of the mirror is often not revealed until it has been soaked in cold water and a



Diameter 7-in.

*Locality*: LOYANG

Formerly in Author's Collection

37.—CH'IN MIRROR

(See illustration 559)



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{8}$ -in.  
*Locality* : LOYANG

Author's Collection  
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

38.—CH'IN MIRROR  
with dragons and arc border



brush vigorously applied to it. Then and not till then can one feel really comfortable, and fairly certain that the glib-tongued dealer has not been too clever for us.

A very simple and useful test is to pass the hand over the engraved side of the mirror, for the old pieces are smooth, even velvety, to the touch, while the newly made ones seem sharp and rough. This method is useful in guarding the much harassed collector against the latest kind of fraud, which is to buy up the plain unengraved mirrors of the earlier dynasties and carve rare and valuable designs and inscriptions on them, a matter of considerable difficulty, but which can be accomplished with care and patience. It is also useful to remember that false patina will often show whitish or frothy signs when put into cold water.

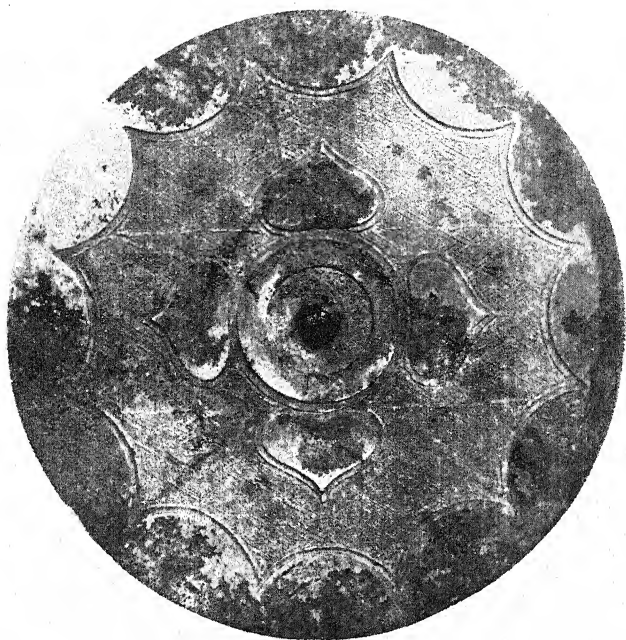
## CHAPTER IX

### THE GREAT CH'IN MYSTERY

It is doubtful if Chinese history, replete as it is with the names of heroes, contains a more famous person than Ch'in Shih Huang, founder of the Ch'in Dynasty, and known to foreigners as the builder of the Great Wall, surely the most stupendous task ever undertaken by human beings, especially when we remember that China at that time was a comparatively small country, and thinly populated. Though he has been dead over two thousand years there is scarcely a man in the land who is not familiar with his misdeeds, and not even Ts'ao Ts'ao, the greatest of stage villains, can outrival him in the public imagination: for did he not commit the unpardonable crimes of attempting to burn all the books and of exterminating the scholars, so that the people, being ignorant and without leaders, would submit to his tyrannies without murmur or thought of rebellion.

His energy and initiative must have been tremendous, and the dynasty, which really began and ended with his reign, is one of the great epochs of Chinese history, and gave birth to some of the finest treasures ever produced by the art of man. There was no lagging when this despot was about, and the artists and workers in metal had very little time for leisure when under his rule and orders. Perhaps he was as generous with his rewards as he was fearful in his punishments, and so gave to genius its opportunity.

Our opening text shows that the products of this shortlived dynasty were of the very highest order, and worthy to rank with the great works of antiquity; while the fact that an honest magistrate is spoken of as a "Ch'in mirror hung up" is a compliment sufficient surely to satisfy the spirit of even the great Emperor himself, if it still takes an interest in the affairs of this part of the world,



Diameter  $7\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

Formerly in Author's Collection

Locality : LOY ANG

### 39.—CH'IN MIRROR

with arc border

DESCRIPTION : The seat of the knob is surrounded by four caltrop leaves while the field of the mirror is covered with a geometric pattern of lozenges enclosing spirals, and edged with a pearl design. The raised ridges of metal would indicate that this field was laid by a die, repeating the design which towards the knob is covered over by the leaves and the gouged circle, and at the outer edge by the series of 12 arcs or segments of circle, possibly symbolic of the duodenary cycle or simply representing an early wave-pattern.



Diameter 4-in.

Rubbing

Locality : LOYANG

40.—CH'IN MIRROR

with intricate background decoration

DESCRIPTION : Four *kwei* dragons alternate with zigzag thunder and lightning motifs, which seem to repeat the intricate ground pattern.



Diameter  $5\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

*Locality* : SHOWCHOW

41.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
showing intricate spiral design

DESCRIPTION : The field of this mirror is laid out by a rectangular die carrying a uniform design of double spirals looking like butterflies and a filling of dots. On this background are set four flowers.



*Locality:* HSUCHOWFU,  
KIANGSU PROV.

42.—CH'IN MIRROR  
with interlocked dragons and lightning motif

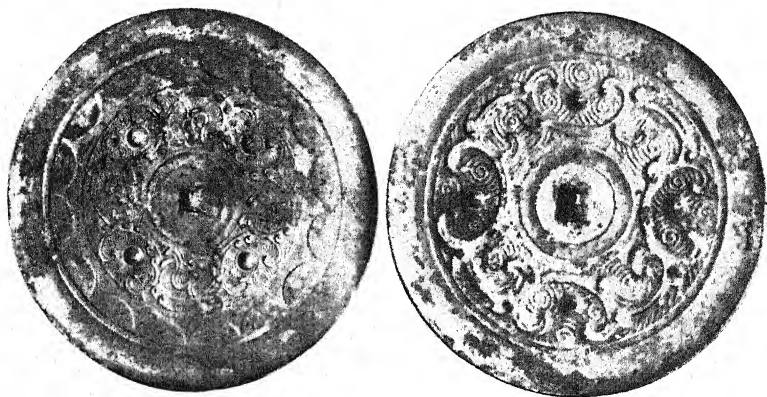


Diameter  $8\frac{1}{8}$ -in.

*Locality*: LOYANG

Author's Collection  
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

43.—CH'IN MIRROR  
with interlocked design of convoluted dragons



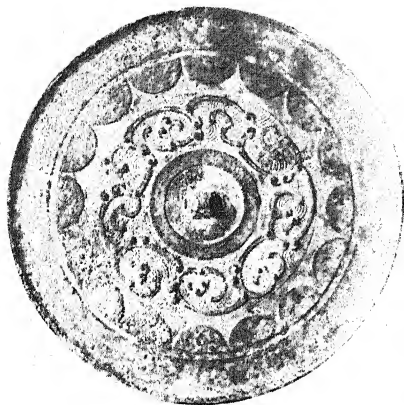
Diameter  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

*Locality* : HUEHSIEN

44.—CH'IN MIRRORS  
of "Bats in the Clouds" type

These and others of similar kind are known as the decadent type of Ch'in Mirrors.





B. Diameter 4-in.



A. Diameter 3½-in.  
Locality: HUEIHSIEN

#### 45.—CH'IN MIRRORS, DECADENT TYPES

DESCRIPTION: *Mirror A.*—On a low background of oblique design, are placed four leafed stems and in between four pointed leaves with linear frames.

*Mirror B.*—The knob and its circular band is surrounded with a rolling ribbon with raised curls. In the south-east whorl may be distinguished the head of a bird with a raised eye. The pattern may thus be a stylized form of *lung-feng*, the dragon and phoenix symbolism of *yin yang* dualism.



46.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

This black enamel mirror is very common in Showchow ; but is also found in Loyang and other places.

The casting is crude and the workmanship poor.

where he once reigned supreme. Rev. J. Menzies, than whom there is no better authority on the subject, however points out that the term Ch'in should not refer solely to the things made during the dynasty, which only lasted some forty odd years, but also to those made in the Ch'in State, which lasted from 897-206 B.C., first as a dukedom, and then as the head of the empire.

Here we come to the strange and seemingly mysterious fact that practically all Chinese books dealing with antiques completely ignore the Ch'in period. While they give many illustrations and particulars of the things produced during the Shang and Chou dynasties, they pass from these to the Han, T'ang and other periods, as if the great Ch'in Shih Huang has never existed. This is partly accounted for by the fact that Chinese writers and historians, on the plea that the dynasty was a shortlived one,<sup>1</sup> refer as little as possible to the famous but damnable emperor, though the real cause of their silence is of course their hatred of him and his works.

In justice to the authors of the books on antiques it must be remembered that as a rule their works were merely catalogues of certain collections, and give little information about curios in general. For instance the *Po Ku T'u* is probably only a description of the collection of the Sung Emperor Hsüan Ho, under whose orders it was published, and the omission of any reference to Ch'in things may be due to the fact that the said emperor did not possess any of them. It would appear therefore that even in the Sung Dynasty the products of the Ch'in period were so scarce that there were none even in the imperial collection, and this rarity would of course tend to become greater as the years went by. There are several reasons which may account for the practical disappearance of these once famous treasures, and as far as the mirrors are concerned we must first remember that they are very thin and brittle; even at the present day, when they are being recovered

<sup>1</sup> The same plea was used concerning the Yüan or Mongol Dynasty.

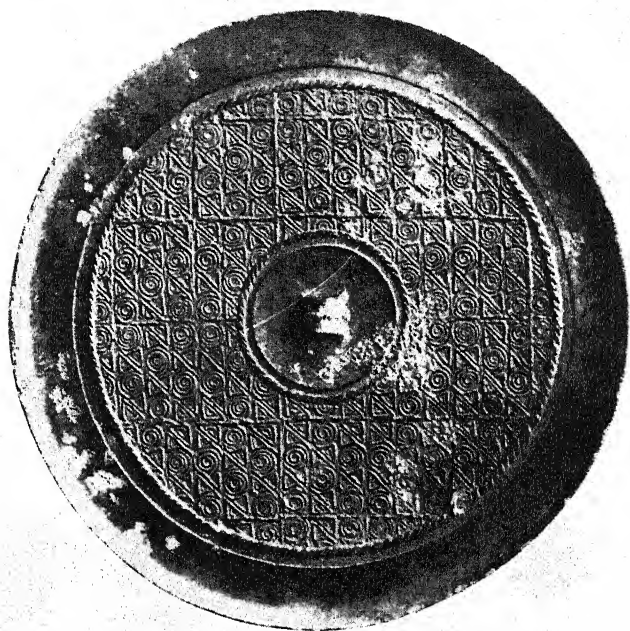
from the ground, great numbers get damaged or broken, and it is not easy to obtain a perfect specimen.

When the dynasty was overthrown by Hsiang Yu 項羽<sup>2</sup> no mercy was shown to the defeated foe, and the order was given that they and all that belonged to them were to be utterly destroyed. The wonderful palaces that extended from Lintung to Hsianfu, a distance of some twenty miles, were burnt to the ground, and it is said that the conflagration lasted many months. It is evident therefore that not only were most of the mirrors and other things destroyed, but also the very walls on which they were hung, and the only ones which escaped this human holocaust were those that were already buried in the ground.<sup>3</sup> During the last few years a considerable number of these mirrors have been excavated, and though the data are still very incomplete, especially with regard to the district round Hsianfu, the former Ch'in capital, it is possible to say with little fear of contradiction, that not only were many bronze mirrors produced during the time of the Ch'in Dynasty, but also that for beauty, design and workmanship they compare favourably with those of any other period.

Few specimens have so far come from Hsianfu, and, as we have said, the first recorded place of discovery is the Huai Valley in Anhwei. Since then a number have been found in South East Honan and also in the centre of the province, as well as in Hueih sien, which is north of the Yellow River. It is however from Loyang, the Queen City of Ancient China, that the best ones have come, and for size, quality and state of preservation they easily surpass those found in other places though some

<sup>2</sup> A general of the state of Ch'u (233-202 B.C.). See GILES: *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*: No. 690.

<sup>3</sup> "The palace was erected within the park or hunting ground called Shan Lin Yüan and 700,000 criminals and prisoners were employed as forced labour in the construction. The central hall was of such dimensions that 10,000 persons could be assembled within it, and banners 60-ft. in height could be unfurled below. Vast as it was, the son and successor of the founder commenced his brief reign in 209 B.C. by adding to its magnificence." W. F. MAYERS: *Chinese Reader's Manual*.



Diameter  $4\frac{3}{8}$ -in.

By courtesy of J. JAVROTSKY

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

47.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

with spiral decorations

Black enamel type, showing distinct Ch'in influence in the fluted boss and in the spiral design.



Diameter 5-in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

48.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

Black enamel type, showing Ch'in influence in the fluted boss and the centre piece.

very fine ones come from Showchow 壽州 in Anhwei.<sup>4</sup> I have seen some looking almost as bright and perfect as when they were new, and the passing of two thousand years has not stained them nor dimmed their lustre. Looking at some of these wonderful treasures one is bound to admit that while the men of old were ignorant of many things that are now commonplace with us, they were greatly skilled in the use of metals.

At this point we may well ask what proof there is that these mirrors were made during the Ch'in Dynasty and not in earlier or later times. It is hard to believe that so high a standard could have been attained in so short a time and the suggestion is that some of the specimens may be of a Chou origin while others may be labelled Han. The *Ch'in Po Ku Yao Lan* 秦博古要覽, or "Description of Ch'in Antiques," would seem to supply this need, but it is unreliable and puts down as Ch'in a number of types that are undoubtedly Han, while it makes no mention of the kinds of Ch'in mirrors that are now known to us.

In the absence of scientific exploration of the places in which these mirrors are found it is not possible to state exactly to what period they belong, but the local people who carry out the excavations and the dealers, who buy from them, seem to have very definite ideas as to what are Ch'in mirrors and what are not; as their ideas are largely influenced by their knowledge of the tombs found in the neighbourhood, and the bronzes and other things that from time to time are obtained from those places, we must, until we get evidence to the contrary, accept their judgment as correct.

It is true that certain of the designs suggest an earlier influence, yet, with the exception of the pierced or open-

<sup>4</sup> It is now generally recognized that the bronzes and jades found in the Showchow and other places in the Huai Valley River should be classified separately, as though showing Ch'in influence, they are different from the specimens found at Loyang and other places where Ch'in influence predominated. They are now known as products of the Huai Valley Period. A great many of them are of the black enamel type (see Appendix I).

work type of mirrors and some others found in the recent excavations at Chintsun and Hsunhsien and which belong to the latter part of the Chou Dynasty, no mirrors have been found in graves of a period earlier than the Ch'in, though many bronzes of the Shang and Chou dynasties have been dug up at various places. The only conclusion to be reached is that it was not customary in those times to bury mirrors in the graves.

It is, however, quite likely that the Chou mirrors that once existed may have influenced to a considerable extent those made in the succeeding dynasty. The fact that none of these newly discovered pieces are shown in the many illustrations we have of Han bronzes makes it unlikely that they belong to that period, and we are once again forced to admit that they are Ch'in pieces, and there is little reason to think otherwise.

The characteristics of Ch'in mirrors may be summed up as follows :

- (1) They are very thin and brittle and so are easily broken.
- (2) They have a very bright reflecting surface, which is often in a high state of preservation.
- (3) The knobs are small and except in a few cases are fluted. This is also a feature of some early Han pieces.
- (4) Very few have characters on them, and even then only commonplace expressions are used.
- (5) The design is often of a very intricate and detailed nature.

We may divide them into five general types.

- (a) Those in which the field is covered with a uniform design in relief, usually of spirals, compound spirals rising to a claw-like point, dots, silkworms, etc. The knob is set on a plain base, or directly on the field and enclosed in a plain or gorged circle or square. The rim is flat, gorged or sometimes festooned with arcs of circles (Mirror 4).



- (b) Mirrors with a field of uniform design in low relief, usually a minute network of spirals, key or meandering design, over which appear in fair relief dragon forms, birds, flowers, etc., or which is spanned by arcs or circles. The rim may be flat, gorged or decorated with arcs (Mirrors 6, 7, 38, 39, 40).
- (c) Mirrors with convoluted ribbons of the *lei wen*, cloud pattern design, stylized birds, interlocking dragons (*p'an-li*), hill censors, etc. The interstices are plain, or filled with spirals, hatchings, etc. . . The field and base of the knob are sometimes enclosed with bands of the rope design (Mirrors 42, 43).
- (d) Mirrors with the TLV design so recognizable from geometrical figures of our alphabet, which project from the rim or inner square. The intervals are decorated with spirals, stylized dragons and S forms. To this category belong the distinctive *Shan* 山 mirrors with Ts projecting into a field of flowers and leaves, and the open V type.
- (e) The fifth class is a very common type and consists of the "Bats in the Clouds" pattern with or without the arc circle on the outside. These are the least attractive of the Ch'in mirrors and are by far the most numerous. They are in reality a decadent type (Mirrors No. 44, 45).

It is not possible to say what the future will reveal about these wonderful mirrors, but when such important results have been got from haphazard excavations, it is only to be expected that when the field is properly explored we shall learn many things of the greatest importance and interest.

## CHAPTER X

### MIRRORS OF THE HAN DYNASTY

HOWEVER much we may be attracted by the romance and grandeur of the bronzes of the earlier periods, it must be admitted that when we come to discuss mirrors the most important place must be given to those made during the Han Dynasty on account of their numbers, their variety, and general standard of excellence. This was also the greatest age in Chinese history, when heroes innumerable lived, famed not only for their prowess in war, but also for their strategy and clever statesmanship.

Our study of Han bronzes is greatly helped by the fact that there are already in existence a number of Chinese books dealing with the subject, and they not only contain valuable illustrations but also give interesting details of the objects shown, especially with regard to their size and weight. We therefore leave the world of conjecture and theory and come to statements which few would care to dispute, for our authorities are men of repute, who were specially chosen for the tasks allotted to them. The chief things to be noticed about Han mirrors are :

- (1) The unusual thickness of many of them, this being in direct contrast to those made during the Ch'in time, which are thin and brittle. A few of the early Han mirrors retain certain features common to the Ch'in period such as the arc circle, the eight characters round the centre and the grooved knob.
- (2) The fine quality of the materials used as seen in the *Shang Fang* and similar types, as well as in those made from *Tanyang* copper.
- (3) The crowded though clear cut design found on many of the specimens, together with the elaborate outer decorations, and the fantastic figures of animals, birds, and what they call spirit men.



Diameter 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.

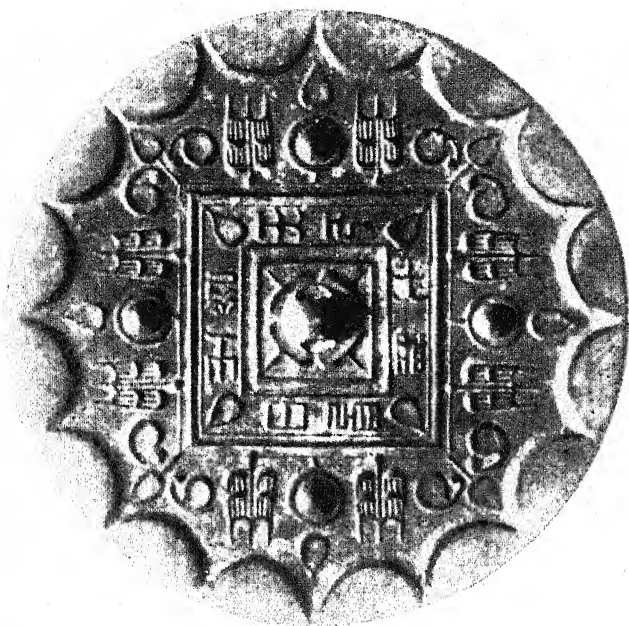
Locality : LOYANG

49.—HAN “SEVEN NIPPLES” OR “SEVEN PLANETS” MIRROR  
with mythological animals and “water” border

DESCRIPTION : From the base of the knob emerges the head of the tortoise, the knob being its shell back, and circling over it that of the serpent its mate; also clawed feet and tails. Chinese tradition ascribes to the tortoise the female sex only and gives it for mate the serpent. Together they thus often stand for the *yin yang* principle, the dualistic alternation and harmony of all things, night to day, winter to summer, dryness to moisture, wind and fire.

Seven nipples, set in between two concentric circles with the oblique tooth-comb design may represent the Seven Rulers of the Times and Seasons (the sun, the moon and the five planets). Alternating with the nipples reappear the animals of the Chinese four quadrants; and also the winged man, the crested bird with a long beak, and the goat.

In the outer edge, lying between two broad plain circles is the double wave pattern, *fu hsien po wen*. The central knob is enclosed in a cord motif with seven triple bands at equal intervals.



Diameter 6-in.

Locality : HUEHSIEN

Author's Collection

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

50.—HAN "SUNLIGHT" MIRROR  
with "Double Bird" Decoration

DESCRIPTION : The square centre motif is like that of a Ch'in brick. The central knob rests on a seat of four leaves. In a rectangular band are eight characters and a leaf in each angle. Four trefoils project from the corners of the square and alternate with the four quadrant knobs and double birds with spread wings.

A sea or wave pattern of sixteen segments edge the mirror.

INSCRIPTION : 見日之光 *Chien jib chih kuang*  
天下大明 *T'ien hsia ta ming*

"See the Sun's light which brightens the whole World"

The *Sun's light* may be a reference to the Emperor.

- (4) The high literary quality of some of the inscriptions and the skilful and elaborate penmanship shown in the writing of them.
- (5) The large number that were used for congratulatory and ceremonial purposes.

Perhaps the first type to be discussed should be the *Jih Kuang* 日光 or "Sunlight Mirrors" about which we have already spoken.<sup>1</sup> As we have shown they retain some of the characteristics of Ch'in mirrors, such as the arc circle and the square round the centre, while their special features are the large size of the knobs,<sup>2</sup> their thickness and the *pi mu* 比目 or double bird decoration. A few specimens have the TLV symbols on them, but such are uncommon. In all humility I would suggest that the name *Pi Mu Ching* 比目鏡, or "Double Bird Mirror," might be substituted for their present rather unsatisfactory name, for not only is the *pi mu* a handsome form of decoration, but it has its origin in the story of a man and wife who were to be separated for a number of years and so broke a mirror in two, each keeping one part. As time went on the wife proved unfaithful to her vow of fidelity, upon which her half of the mirror took the form of a bird, and flying to her husband's abode joined up with his portion. Surely no more powerful argument could be advanced for the changing of a name.

We now come once again to what are called by foreign collectors TLV mirrors, but which are generally classified by the Chinese either under the name of the maker or according to the inscription or form of decoration found on them. In fact none of the Chinese writers on antiques make any comment whatever on what are for us such interesting signs. It is impossible for a foreigner not to feel a thrill of excitement on seeing them for the first time. They are so distinct, and so suggestive of the Latin alphabet, that we at once begin to form theories, and say

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, Designs and Decorations.

<sup>2</sup> A few have fluted knobs like the Ch'in mirrors.

with every show of confidence that even in those early times western art and influence had penetrated to this distant land.<sup>3</sup> Alas these pleasing fancies soon prove to be unreal, for, as we know, these symbols have no connection whatever with our alphabet, but are most probably parts of the meandering patterns. Nor are these three symbols always used together, for there are Ch'in mirrors with only Ts on them, and others with only Ls, and Vs.

In the Han design there are also many variations, the most common being the omission of the Vs. In the Ch'in times these three symbols were shown in a very striking and effective manner, but in the Han specimens they have a plain, and even commonplace appearance (see illustrations 5, 12, 13, 21) and were probably used to fill in spaces or to separate from one another the animals and other forms that go to make up the design.

The earliest examples of these TLV mirrors show a distinct Ch'in influence, not only in the grooved knob but also in their general appearance. Mr. O. Karlbeck mentions having obtained one of this kind from the Huai Valley district in Anhwei Province, and he subsequently learnt from Mr. Lo Chen-yu, of Tientsin, who is a noted authority on bronzes, that the inscription on it is one that was in common use during the Han Dynasty, and that several mirrors of similar kind have been found in Shensi<sup>4</sup> (see illustration 11).

Some of the later TLV mirrors are amongst the choicest products of the Han era, being made of the finest materials, while the patterns are distinct, and the workmanship of the highest order (see illustration 21). We have also told of the inscriptions, which not only show a high literary standard, but are often written in a strange and bizarre manner. There are a number of Han mirrors that are similar to these in style and structure but without

<sup>3</sup> Designs indicating Scythian influence are frequently seen on Han bricks and stones, but seldom on mirrors.

<sup>4</sup> *China Journal of Science and Arts*, January, 1926.



Diameter 4-in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

*Locality*: LOYANG

51.—HAN "FOUR NIPPLES" OR "FOUR ANIMALS" MIRROR

DESCRIPTION: In the animal zone four nipples separate winged tigers and crested dragons. The four mythical animals are known as the *Ssu Ling*, spiritually endowed creatures of happy portent.



Diameter  $3\frac{3}{4}$ -in.

*Locality*: LOYANG

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

52.—HAN MIRROR

Variation of Nipples and Gecko type



the TLV decoration. One of the best of these was made by the Lung Family 龍氏 and is described in the *Chin Shih Chi* 金石記, or "History of antiques." The *Ho Shih Hsien Jen Ching* 壺氏仙人鏡, or "Ho Family Spirit Mirror," is another famous one, and there are others equally rare and valuable (see illustration 66).

Judging from the number of mirrors designed for the purpose, a very common and much appreciated compliment in the old days was to make reference to a person's numerous descendants. These mirrors though inferior to the TLV ones in design and workmanship are nevertheless of a striking and handsome appearance. Many of them have an inner border consisting of an arc circle and outside of this arc are a number of circular lines, the significance of which seems to be unknown. The good wishes written round the centre show little originality, the most common form being *Chang i tzü sun* 長宜子孫, "May you have for ever dutiful sons and grandsons." The characters are often written in the "hanging needle" or the "bird-footprint" style, forms of writing much appreciated by the Han scholars.

Contrary to what one would expect the mirrors wishing good luck and promotion to an official are, with a few exceptions, small and insignificant. While the phraseology on them is staid and commonplace, as for example *Chün i kao kuan* 君宜高官, "You, Sir, possess the qualifications for a high official post." More originality is shown, as we have mentioned before, when the hope is expressed that the recipient may become a duke (see illustration 32).

Nipples are often found on Han mirrors and represent various things according to their number. When there are four of them they stand for the four quarters of the globe, if there are seven then the planets are indicated, while if they cover the surface of the mirror they represent the stars.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. W. P. Yetts has discussed this inscription in his study of mirrors in the *Eumorfopoulos Collection of Chinese Bronzes*, Vol. III. (See illustration 26, and frontispiece).

<sup>6</sup> See illustrations 33, 34 and 35

Sometimes they take the form of animals or flowers and the mirror is then known as the *Pai Ju Ching* 百乳鏡, or "Hundred Nipple Mirror." A very common form of the four nipple mirror is one that has the gecko decoration on it, the small birds shown being rather poor representations of the male and female phoenix (see illustrations 52, 53).

A common type that exists in a number of varying forms is called the *Ch'ing Pai Ching* 清白鏡 or "Clear White Mirror." The chief feature is a circle of strangely written characters, which are often difficult to read. Inside of this is an arc circle while round the knob are unusually to be found twelve discs or buttons possibly representing the divisions of the year (see illustrations 29, 30).

A totally different kind of mirror is that which has various raised forms running round the centre. When portraying a dragon, *lung*, and a phoenix, *feng*, trying to catch the sun it is evident that they were used on the occasion of a marriage, *lung-feng* expresses the dual harmony of male and female forces. But they often have on them representations of whales and other sea monsters, and would then appear to be decorative without any special significance.

There are many other types of Han mirrors, but those we have described are either the most important ones, or those which are fairly common, and so will most likely fall into the hands of the ordinary collector.



Diameter 4-in.

Locality : YENLING

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

53.—HAN MIRROR  
with Four Nipple and Gecko Design

DESCRIPTION : The animal zone is framed with two flat "rope" patterns. The animals are in linear relief, the elongated S-forms being identified with the gecko, and the four pairs of birds in the dips of the S with the *feng-huang*, dualistic harmony of nature. In Chinese poetry allusions to sexual pairing are intimated by reference to the inseparable fellowship of the *feng* (male) and *huang* (female) phoenixes.

This is a common type of Han mirror and is found in many places.



Diameter 3-in.

*Locality* : LOYANG

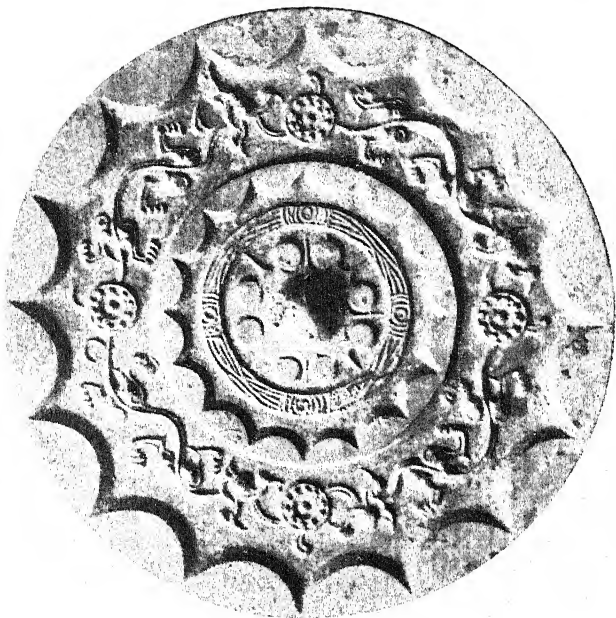
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

54.—HAN PRESENTATION MIRROR

INSCRIPTION : The four characters are as follows :—

富 貴 家 鏡

TRANSLATION : May this Mirror bring riches and official advancement to the family.



Diameter  $5\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

*Locality* : LOYANG

55.—HAN "DRAGONS AND PEARLS" MIRROR



Diameter  $5\frac{1}{2}$ -in.  
Locality: LOYANG

Author's Collection  
Photo by J. M. PLUMER

### 56.—LIU CHAO OR SIX DYNASTIES MIRROR

with an unusual type of animal decoration. The V motif appears without the T or L.

DESCRIPTION: The knob is encircled in a pearl pattern design, *chu wen*, represented by a series of dots. The four Vs or right angles divide the animal zone into four quadrants each occupied by the running animals. The background is decorated with shapes of comas representing quite possibly waves or clouds. The Four Seas, according to Chinese notions, limited the habitable Earth.

INSCRIPTION:

寫 衣 簪 乎 前 殿	鑒 羅 綺 於 後 庭	挂 玉 台 而 影 見	藏 寶 匣 而 光 掩	圓 輝 屬 面	絕 照 覽 心
----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	------------------	------------------

In its reflection one can read one's heart,  
And also see the image of one's face.

When put into a box its light is hidden.

If it is put on the jade frame your form is reflected.

If placed in the inner palace the fair dames may see the reflection of their faces.

If placed in the outer palace the clothes and forms of the courtiers may also be seen.

The style of the inscription indicates that the mirror was made during the Liu Chao or Six Dynasties Period. It was intended for use in the Palace.



Diameter 4-in.

Locality : LUWANGFEN, North of the Yellow River

### 57.—SIX DYNASTIES (CHIN 晉) MIRROR

Type of the Six Dynasties Mirrors, commonly called *T'ien Wang* or "Heavenly Emperor" Mirror, as the characters 天王 are often found on the representations of name seals which form part of the inner border. In this case the characters 天王 are not used. It would seem as if precious stones had once formed part of the decorations of this mirror.

DESCRIPTION : It is characterized by the belt of ten circular lobes and inscribed squares, and the inner zone of two seated divinities. A pearl design encircles the seat of the knob and reappears also near the outer edge. Four cupped nipples seem to have been set with precious stones, though a nodule appears in one of them. Separating the squatting divinities are lions with lolling tongues, dragons and a bird as far as can be distinguished. The lobe and square field is studded with nodules of the grain (*ku*) design. Sets of three raised leaves decorate the wall in the intervals of the lobes. Beyond the dog-teeth band is a narrow animal zone with elongated forms of birds near a dimple, *ch'i-lins*, dragons and other indistinguishable animals. The edge design is compounded of wedges and the double wave pattern interlined with dots.



Diameter  $3\frac{9}{16}$ -in.

Photo by J. M. PLUMER

58.—SIX DYNASTIES MIRROR  
with belt of ten seals without characters on them



## CHAPTER XI

### MIRRORS OF THE SIX DYNASTIES

THE passing of the Han Dynasty in A.D. 220 is of more interest to the historian than to the collector of antiques, and the same may be said of the succeeding four hundred years when dynasties were shortlived, and the emperors had to think of sterner things than the study of literature and the fine arts.

However, it would be a great mistake to ignore this period completely, for, as jewels shine brightest in the dark, so from this time of change and revolt appear some very famous mirrors, especially the dated ones made in the reign of the Emperor Yüan K'ang of the Chin Dynasty, to which reference has already been made. It is impossible not to feel thankful to the persons who were responsible for putting the date on these very precious things, for by doing so they not only fixed their authenticity but also put the hall mark of respectability on all ancient mirrors.

With regard to the Liu Chao or Six Dynasties, the position is also fairly satisfactory. Some of the mirrors attributed to this period, though bearing a general resemblance to certain Han mirrors, seem to be made of inferior materials, while the pattern is not clear or well cut. There is a tendency to overcrowd the centre with ungainly forms, while animal heads and facsimiles of *ts'chang* 圖章 or name seals, frequently appear. Some of them also had jewels on them, and though the stones themselves have long since disappeared it is easy to recognize the places in which they were once set. In what we must presume to be the later types there is a tendency to depart from the close and intricate patterns, so often seen on Han mirrors, and to adopt a more open design like that shown on many T'ang pieces.

As we have shown, the inscriptions on the Liu Chao mirrors should be carefully examined for they may contain

certain expressions and forms of writing peculiar to that time and so help to fix the period to which the mirror belongs. We have also discussed the famous *bui wen* or continuous sentence, which was invented by the lady scholar, Su Jê-lan. Any one of the characters on it may be taken as representing the first word of the inscription which forms in each case a clear and complete sentence. It is, of course, purely a literary trick but has brought undying fame to the originator, and given much pleasure to multitudes of scholars of each succeeding generation.

## CHAPTER XII

### MIRRORS OF THE T'ANG DYNASTY

It is not without a feeling of relief that we are able to turn from the historically nebulous period between A.D. 220-618, and speak once again about a long-lived and respectable dynasty. Interest is added by the fact that this same dynasty, namely, the T'ang, is really the dividing line between the old and the new, the link between the hoary mists of antiquity and the time when history became more or less an accurate record of events. The influence of the West also began to appear, for Buddhism was introduced from India, while the many and varied types of faces<sup>1</sup> on the clay figures found round Loyang<sup>2</sup> show that amongst the denizens of the Court must have been many strangers from other lands. These changing conditions naturally affected the style and quality of the mirrors produced, and many of the chief features of the Han and earlier designs are missing.

The arc circle, the decorations round the knob, the elaborate outer borders, and even the TLV symbols are no longer to be seen, and instead of a crowded canvas we get one, two, or four groups of birds, or animals, or even people, and very little extra ornamentation. Stylization gives way to more or less true representations, while the laws of movement were evidently carefully studied, for we have beautiful flying geese, the winged messengers of old, also running animals, and horses at full gallop, sometimes carrying wild and daring riders. Birds come into their own, and we not only get wonderful phoenixes<sup>3</sup> and flying geese, but also gorgeous peacocks and many less important

<sup>1</sup> Many of these faces are distinctly Semitic in appearance.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are also found in other parts of Honan, such as Yenling-hsien 鄆陵縣 and Huehsien 輝縣.

<sup>3</sup> Though the name phoenix is given to these birds they are generally birds of paradise.

species. Ch'in and Han dragons are often puny and unsatisfactory creatures, but on the T'ang mirrors they are quite awesome and seemingly capable of the terrible deeds attributed to them. Floral designs are common and form the sole decoration of a number of mirrors, while others portray famous and historical scenes, such as the meeting of Confucius and Jung Ch'i-ch'i at the foot of T'ai Shan, or the Buddhist priest crossing the sea in search of the Law.

The most remarkable of all T'ang mirrors, however, are those known as the "Sea-horse and Grape" type. The importance attached to them is shown by the fact that in the *Ning Shou Chien Ku* 寧壽鑑古, which was compiled by the orders of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, and which described the bronzes of the imperial collection, no fewer than twenty-seven of these particular mirrors are shown. The design on them may be divided into two parts, namely an inner circle where there are generally four or more animals sporting themselves amongst grapevines, and an outer circle where there are more vines and where birds take the place of the quadrupeds. There are, however, many varieties of the design and sometimes strange beasts and even birds may be found in the centre, while on the outside butterflies, bees, birds, and even animals may be seen. There are specimens where the birds predominate, and others where the outer decoration consists solely of vines. In some cases the vines cross over from one circle to the other. These particular mirrors vary greatly in size and quality, while a few are square in shape. Those most sought after are the large ones with thick edges and clear-cut designs, some of which show the wonderful flying horses, and which are described by the phrase *T'ien-ma fei k'ung* 天馬飛空, "Celestial horses riding the air."

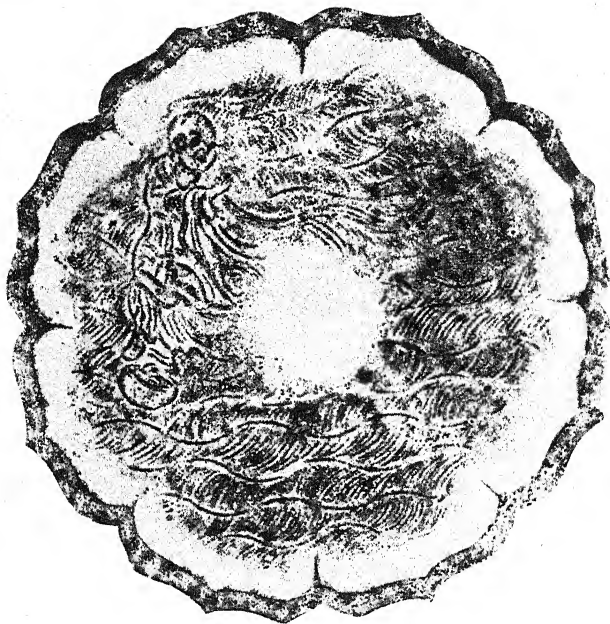
After burial in the ground some of them take on a silvery appearance, which adds to their value, and there are also some *hei ch'i ku*, or black enamel ones. They seem to have been very popular and are greatly admired even to this day.



Diameter 5-in.

*Locality:* LOYANG

59.—T'ANG MIRROR  
Dragon and Sun motif



Diameter  $5\frac{3}{4}$ -in.

Rubbing

Locality : LOYANG

# 60.—T'ANG-SUNG MIRROR

illustrating the "Cup-boat Monk Crossing the Sea"

DESCRIPTION: This mirror illustrates the story of the Cup-boat Monk, or monk who crossed rivers on his begging bowl, *Pei-tu chan-shih* 北渡禪師. He was a saintly Buddhist monk of the sixth century and was one of the guests to the annual banquets of the Gods at the K'un-lun Palace of Hsi Wang Mu (Werner: *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*).



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

*Locality:* LOYANG

#### 61.—T'ANG MIRROR

illustrating the famous story of Hsiao Shih 蕭史 under the Wu-tung tree, who by his wonderful music attracted the phœnixes

**DESCRIPTION:** The immortal recognized by his lotus cap is playing the *sheng* a sort of instrument in the form of a pot with reeds; he is blowing through the stem. His music draws the Phœnix which feeds on the fruit of the bamboo and lives on the K'un-lun Mountain in the distant abodes of the Taoist Paradise.

Duke Mu of Ch'in (VI Century B.C.) gave Hsiao Shih his daughter Lung Yü to wife, and he instructed her in performing upon the flute with which he had marvellous skill. The harmony of their concert "drew phœnixes from the skies." Eventually, husband and wife were caught up to heaven, the one by a dragon, and the other by a phœnix (MAYERS: 580). The Taoist immortal is distinguished by his lotus cap, and the regions of immortality by the Mountain of K'un-Lun.



Diameter  $6\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

62.—T'ANG "SEA-HORSE AND GRAPE" TYPE OF MIRROR  
showing sea monsters and phoenixes in the centre, and flying horses  
and other animals and birds on the outer band





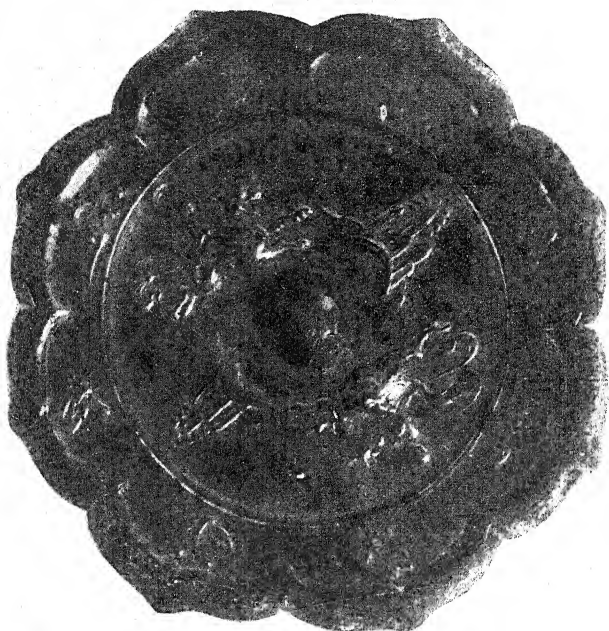
Diameter 5-in.

Locality : LOYANG

### 63.—T'ANG MIRROR

an interesting variation of the "Four Running Animals" design

DESCRIPTION : Belongs to the *Hai-ma P'u-t'ao* or "Sea-horse and Grape" type. The four animals here appear to be like dogs with their pointed muzzles. The tendrils of the grape plant support both leaves and fruit. The outer edge is decorated with a double row of the raised dog-teeth pattern.



Diameter  $4\frac{1}{4}$  in.

Locality : LOYANG

#### 64.—T'ANG MIRROR

##### Flying Horse and Spirit Mountain Type

DESCRIPTION : *T'ien-ma fei k'ung* 天馬飛空, "Celestial horses riding the air." They are ridden by the Immortals going to the Kun-lun Mountains of Bliss.

The mirror is shaped in the form of the water-chestnut blossom (*ling hua*). The lobes are decorated with sprigs, insects and flying clouds (*fei yün*).

T'ang mirrors vary much in shape: we get six and eight-sided ones, also some with scalloped edges, while others are formed after the shape of a leaf or flower.

The best specimens are almost perfect in design and workmanship. The quality of the materials leaves little to be desired, but there are others in which a considerable quantity of lead seems to have been mixed with the copper, with the result that the design often becomes blurred and indistinct, and the mirror specially liable to corrosion through the action of chemicals present in the soil in which it lay buried.

A very popular design is that of the four running animals found on the Ch'in Wang mirrors, and which have already been described. There are a number of variations of this pattern and some of the inscriptions show considerable literary merit. The mirrors portraying movement are much favoured by collectors, the best known being those on which there are pairs of galloping horses and flying geese, with riders on their backs.

Another popular one is of two men on horseback, who appear to throw a lasso or carry lances, while opposite to them are spirit mountains.

Flying birds with their messages gracefully flowing from their mouths make a handsome picture, but surely the most aristocratic of all is that of two peacocks arrayed in all their glory. The largest T'ang mirrors are of this style, and are reckoned amongst the most valuable of the decorative types. Mirrors on which flowers form the main decoration, though often very fine and handsome in appearance, are not greatly prized by collectors, who much prefer movement or originality in the design.

The *Pa Kua* 八卦 or Eight trigrams often appear, which is not surprising as they are connected with fate, and arranged in a circle form a common talisman of good fortune. This symbol leads us naturally to the mirrors used by the Taoist priests, whose religion is so closely interwoven with necromancy and superstitious practices. With the advent of Buddhism into China, the

connection between religion and mirrors became closer, and the priests of the new order not only used them for casting out devils, but also put them into the bodies of idols in order to protect them against the machinations of their enemies.

With the end of the dynasty there came a sad deterioration in the ranks of the workers in metal, and changing for our own purpose the phrase of the old antiquarian, we would say *T'ang hou wu ching* 唐後無鏡, "After the T'ang there are no mirrors."



Diameter  $3\frac{1}{4}$ -in.

Locality : LOYANG

# 65.—T'ANG MIRROR

“ Animals and Birds ” design

A common type of T'ang Mirror of rather crude workmanship.

The butterfly motif is frequently met with in Chinese art, as the word *tieh* 蝶, butterfly, puns with *tieh* 耋, seventy to eighty years of age : a delicate way of expressing wishes for long life.



66.—“LUNG SHIH” MIRROR

A Sung Reproduction of the Han “Lung Family” Mirror

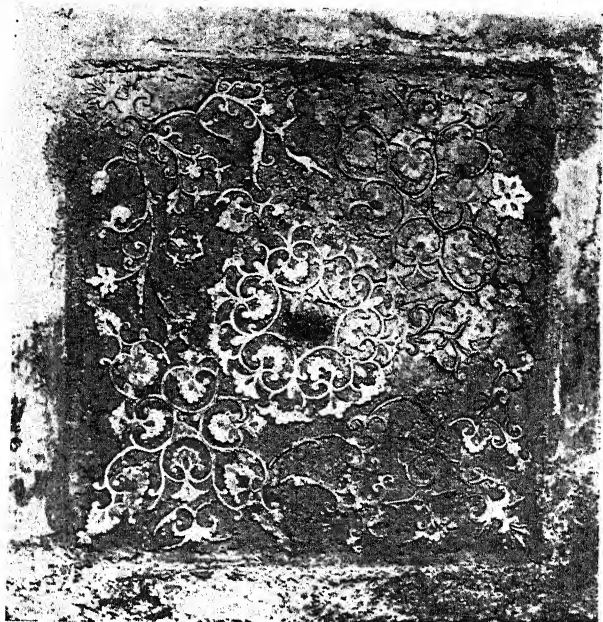
DESCRIPTION OF MIRROR 66 : In the intervals of the four floral designs set with pointed nipples appear Hsi Wang Mu and her opposite consort Tung Wang Fu with attendants : the tiger and half human figure (P'an Ku ?) ; the horse drawn chariot and panoply.

The story of Hsi Wang Mu, the Western Queen Mother, belongs to the legendary history of China. Herbert A. Giles, in his *Adversaria Sinica*, asks "Who is Hsi Wang Mu?" and from legend, tradition and great diversity of opinions arrives at identifying the Goddess with Hera or Juno of Homeric legends and mythology. In Taoist mythology she is the Goddess of Immortality, in whose gardens at the foot of the Kun-lun Mountain grows the peaches of immortality and to whose banquets are invited all the immortals and divine heroes of antiquity. Her consort, Tung Wang Fu, drove to her court in a chariot drawn by eight horses. The coiled-up or rolled cloud pattern, *ch'üan yün*, decorates the outer edge and is separated from the inscription band, the saw teeth and the rope designs.

INSCRIPTION :	西	子。	長	刻	而	龍
	王	東	保	治	明	氏
	母	王	二	分	日	作
	祥	父	親	守	月	竟
	矣	大	宜	悉	世	佳
	兮。	吉。	孫	皆	少	且
				在。	有。	好。

A mirror made by the Lung Family is beautiful and fine.  
It is bright like the sun and the moon and there are not many of them in the world.  
Upon it is written "Be careful every quarter and be watchful every second."

May it give protection to our parents and descendants.  
The Eastern King Father and the Western Queen Mother truly bring great happiness and fortune.



Courtesy of Dr. H. MUELLER

67.—T'ANG ENAMEL MIRROR

with gold and silver inlay.

DESCRIPTION: The mirror is decorated with a floral design in gold and silver imbedded in a lacquer filling of the hollow metal of the mirror. It belongs to a class of mirrors which are found more frequently in Japan than in China.



## CHAPTER XIII

### SUNG REPRODUCTIONS

DURING the Sung Dynasty, there was a great revival of learning and advance of general culture. The Emperor Hsüan Ho was an artist of no mean ability, and painted the famous picture *Hsüan Ho Ying* 宣和鷹, or "Hsüan Ho's Eagle," depicting a white eagle on the branch of a tree, which has probably been reproduced and imitated more than any other picture in the world. This same Emperor ordered the compilation of the *Po Ku T'u* 博古圖, or "Illustrations of the Hundred Antiques," and tried, through his workmen, to reproduce the bronzes and other treasures of the early dynasties.

It must be confessed that the results were not satisfactory, and there are few sadder things in the world than a comparison between some magnificent specimen of Chou art and the counterpart made during the time of the Sung, a thousand or more years later. The one is a brilliant masterpiece, probably covered with wonderful patina, while the other is a poor sickly imitation, lifeless and without distinction of any kind. The same may be said of the reproductions of Han mirrors, which are but sorry things, made of poor materials, and as a rule without the tin which was used as a brightening and reflecting agent. The white silver-like appearance, called by the Chinese *shui yin p'ien* 水銀片<sup>1</sup> or mercury coating, is a distinctive feature of practically all the early mirrors; but most of those made in later times have nothing but a copper surface.

The chief interest lies in finding out what types were considered worthy of reproduction and then comparing them wherever possible with the originals. The "Clear

<sup>1</sup> This is best seen in some of the Ch'in and early Han mirrors, where not only is the reflecting surface very bright but the back of the mirror has a beautiful silvery appearance.

Brightness" Han mirrors were much copied, as was also the type that has aquatic and other animals round the centre, while the TLV design in its varied forms was popular, not only during the Sung period but also much later.

Illustration 66 shows a Sung reproduction of a famous mirror, the *Lung Shih Ching* 龍氏鏡, or "Lung Family Mirror," which, as we have mentioned, is described in the "History of the Han Dynasty."

There are, of course, many original Sung mirrors, but they do not come within the scope of this work, and have little in common with the earlier types.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME RARE AND PECULIAR MIRRORS

THE quest after mirrors is undoubtedly enlivened by the thought that there is always a chance of getting something rare and valuable for a comparatively small sum. With a true gambler's instinct we earnestly hope for the day when fortune will thus smile on us, quite ignoring the fact that we are much more likely to be the victims of some trickster, and be made to pay a high price for something overestimated in value, or which has some fault or defect not discovered in time. A certain amount of optimism is justified, however, for few people know much about the real value of mirrors, and even many dealers show considerable ignorance on the subject. It must also be remembered that most of the mirrors that come to light are found by country people, who know little or nothing about their worth, and are apt to judge a piece by its appearance, which is of course a very deceptive standard.

Again many pieces when dug up are covered with patina which hides the design, and so they can often be got cheaply, though, as a rule, not before the finders have scratched through to the surface to see if there is by chance a gold or silver covering. Most of the mirrors so bought will prove to be common types and in many cases cracked or disfigured, yet there still remains the hope that some long-sought specimen may be found, and our enterprise at last rewarded.

Amongst the unusual types of mirrors we may first mention the iron ones, which are said to be of the Han and Liu Chao periods. It is difficult to account for their being manufactured for they are by no means elegant and their reflecting powers must have been small. Their comparative cheapness cannot be given as the reason for their existence, for some of them have gold and silver inlay work on them, and these must have been even more expensive than the great majority of the bronze ones. Perhaps they were chiefly used for putting into graves,

for we are told that forty iron mirrors were put into the grave of one of the Emperors of the Wei Dynasty.

On the *chin k'e* 金壳, or gold-covered mirrors, a layer of gold-leaf is worked round and over the pattern, giving it a very beautiful effect. The workmanship is exquisite, and it is difficult to believe that the mirror is not a gold one, but merely covered with a layer of the precious metal. As we have said before there are also *yin k'e* 銀壳 or silver-covered ones, and *liu chin* 鍍金 or gold-plated ones. The most valuable ones, however, are those known as *tso ching* 惜鏡 which are covered with enamel with gold and silver inlay work.

There are also old jade mirrors though they are scarce, and I have seen a beautiful black one which was dug up some time ago.

Considerable interest has been aroused by the so-called Magic Mirrors for when a light strikes their reflecting surface they will throw upon a wall or screen the design which is on the other side as if they were transparent. Professors Ayrton and Perry, who have made a study of Japanese mirrors of a similar type, have proved that the image on the screen is due to the fact that the curvature of the reflecting surface is greater than that of the engraved side, a rather prosaic explanation of a matter that has puzzled collectors for many generations. Sir William Bragg, in a series of articles entitled "The Universe of Light" which appeared in the *Illustrated London News* during 1932, explains the magic mirror as follows:—"It is a metal mirror, polished in front by scraping and scouring; on the back is a deeply incised pattern. When the light is reflected by the mirror and thrown upon the screen, the pattern on the back appears in the reflection. The eye can see nothing in the front to account for this seeming marvel. The explanation is that in the scraping the thin parts give way and do not lose so much metal as the thick. After the tool has gone over them, they rebound and stand up as minute elevations too small to be seen by the naked eye. Only the magnifying effect of reflection makes them plain. . . ."

MONSIEUR HENRI LAMBERT'S  
COLLECTION OF CHINESE MIRRORS

## CLASSIFICATION

CH'IN : 530, 534, 619, 621.

HUAI VALLEY : 502, 503, 510, 520, 526, 529, 544, 559,  
560, 562, 594, 595, 596, 597, 599, 604, 609.

HAN : 511, 572, 613, 616, 617.

SIX DYNASTIES : 548, 602, 603.

T'ANG : 549, 550, 556, 601.



Diameter  $15\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

*Locality* : LOYANG

530.—CH'IN MIRROR

with three dragon-like birds on a ground of lozenge pattern



Diameter 20-cm.

Locality : LOYANG

613.—HAN MIRROR

with genre figures and with an outer circle of animal design

INSCRIPTION : In verse form, with four characters to a line :

視臨照鸞皎團  
 [皂]池月窺皎團  
 嬌[似]花自昇寶  
 來月開舞臺鏡

Word for word : Round, round, precious mirror  
 Bright, bright on the high altar ;  
 The *lung* phoenix looking at the mirror dances to its own reflection  
 Reflecting the moon, a blossoming flower ;  
 Over a pond, shining like the moon ;  
 It appears like (?) a beautiful lady.



## MIRRORS FROM THE COLLECTION OF MONSIEUR H. LAMBERT

THE photographs received through the courtesy of Monsieur H. Lambert are of special interest in that a number of the mirrors illustrated come from the Huai River Valley, particularly from the vicinity of Showchow in Anhwei. From this district a large number of bronzes and jades have been excavated during recent years, which have attracted much attention on account of their beauty of form, the excellence of their workmanship, and their wonderful patina.

At first they were called products of the Ch'in Dynasty, it being assumed that they were made during the time of the state of Ch'u, which was attacked and finally conquered by the Ch'in Emperor and incorporated in his kingdom. While Huai Valley mirrors show a distinct Ch'in influence, and in certain instances are very similar to Ch'in mirrors from Loyang and Hueih sien, there are also a number of types which have features of their own, and which are distinct from what are commonly known as Ch'in mirrors. In the first place the great majority of the Huai Valley mirrors are of the *hei ch'i ku* or black enamel type, and while a few of the recognized Ch'in mirrors are of similar construction, most of the finest ones are made of what is called silver bronze.

Again the designs of many of the Huai Valley mirrors are crude, and the workmanship poor, as may be seen in illustrations 48, 503, 510, 524, 526, 562, 595, 596, 597, which are typical Huai Valley pieces, and which are not found amongst the Ch'in excavations in Honan.

There are also other Huai Valley types which are not represented here but which show foxes and bears and other animals which are not found amongst Ch'in designs.

Again certain common Ch'in mirrors of the "decadent" type, as represented by illustrations numbers 44, 45, are not found in the Huai Valley. On the other hand the

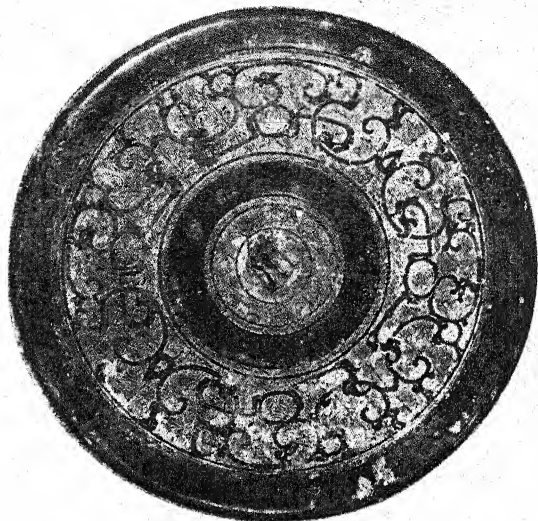
T or *shan* 山 mirrors and other variations of the TLV design are found in both places, and the mirrors in illustrations Nos. 14, 16, 17 and 18, might as far as can be judged from their appearance come from either Loyang or Showchow.

The interlocked design, as shown in mirrors 502, 503, 594, 599, 604, is common amongst Huai Valley mirrors, but illustration 43 is of a mirror which came from Loyang, and is of a type not uncommon there, while mirror 42 came from Hsuehchowfu, which is a kind of half-way house between Loyang and Showchow.

There is also great similarity between mirrors 37 and 559, though the first one comes from Loyang and the second one from Showchow.

The same may be said of mirrors 4, 24, and 544, the first one of which came from Hueihhsien in Honan and the other two from the Huai Valley.

It would seem, therefore, that while a Ch'in influence may be seen in many Huai Valley mirrors, there are a number of types from that district which are quite distinct. This would seem to testify that the Huai Valley had a culture of its own, and became in time largely independent of other influences.



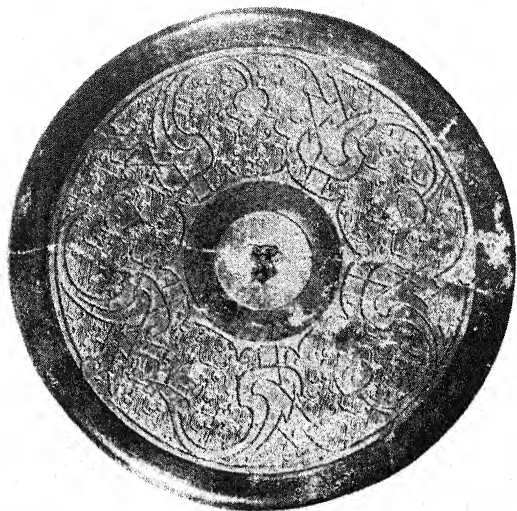
Diameter 13-cm.

502.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR  
with dragon scrolls on a ground of spiral pattern



Diameter 14-cm.

503.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR  
with pattern of entangled dragons



Diameter  $13\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

510—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR.

with conventionalised birds on a ground of feather-like animal pattern

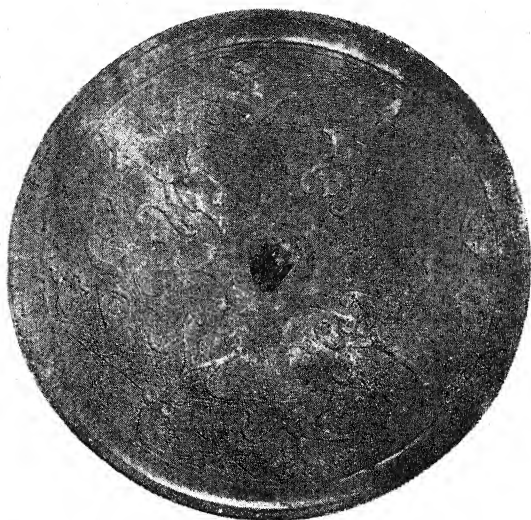


Diameter 11-cm.

511.—HAN MIRROR

with three tigers

*Locality* : LOYANG



Diameter  $10\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

*Locality : LOYANG*

518.—CH'IN MIRROR

with four birds on a ground of lozenge pattern



Diameter 14-cm.

520.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

with pattern of entangled dragons



Diameter  $16\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

524.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with pattern of entangled dragons and with inscription



Diameter 12-cm.

526.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with modified animal pattern on a ground of spiral and triangle pattern

Unusually thick



Diameter 17-cm.

Has many features typical of Ch'in mirrors

529.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with four dragons on a ground of spiral pattern



Diameter 19-cm.

532.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with dragon scrolls on a ground of spiral and lozenge pattern



Diameter 9-cm.

*Locality* : LOYANG

534.—CH'IN MIRROR

with four conventionalised birds on a lozenge pattern

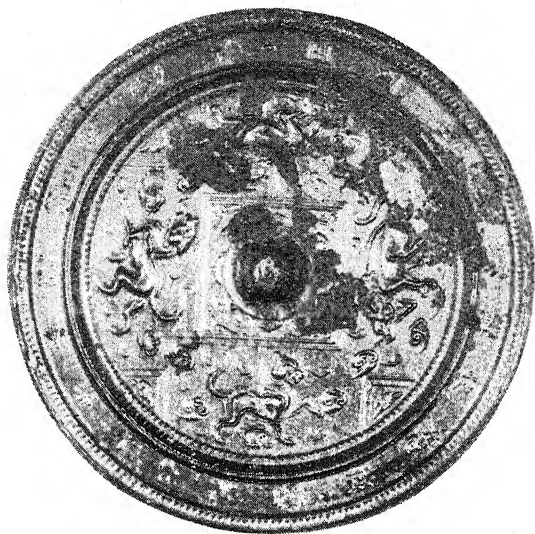


Diameter  $9\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

544.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with feather-like animal pattern. Very similar to Ch'in Mirror,  
Illustration No. 4.





Diameter  $15\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

*Locality:* LOYANG

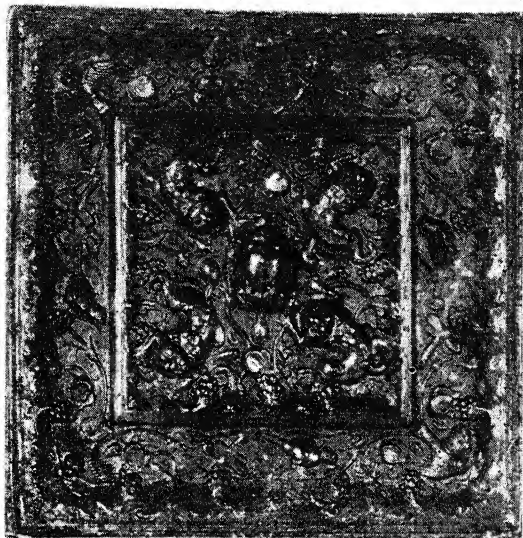
548.—SIX DYNASTIES MIRROR  
with figures of four animals and with inscription



Diameter 23-cm.

*Locality:* LOYANG

549.—T'ANG EIGHT-LOBED MIRROR  
with phoenixes and lotus design

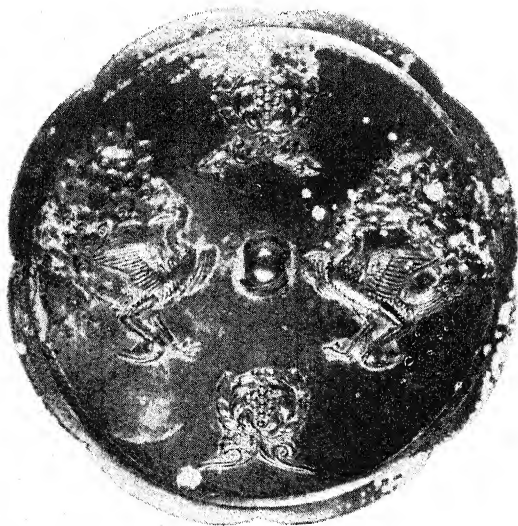


Width  $9\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

*Locality: LOYANG*

550.—T'ANG SQUARE MIRROR

with animal-shaped knob and designs of sea monsters and grapes



Diameter 19-cm.

*Locality: LOYANG*

556.—T'ANG EIGHT-LOBED MIRROR

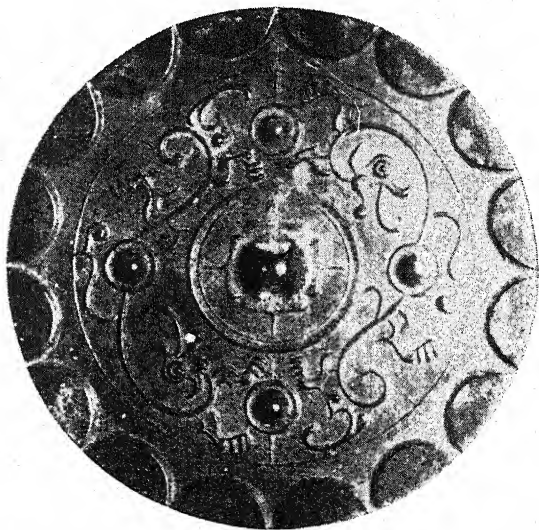
with two peacocks and floral designs



Diameter  $16\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

559.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

with concatenated arcs on a ground of spiral pattern ; with the exception of the boss might be taken for a Ch'in Mirror



Diameter  $11\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

560.—HUAI VALLEY MIRROR

with concentric circles, four nipples representing pearls and conventionalised dragons



Diameter 14-cm.

562.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with concatenated arcs and with bird design



Diameter 12-cm.

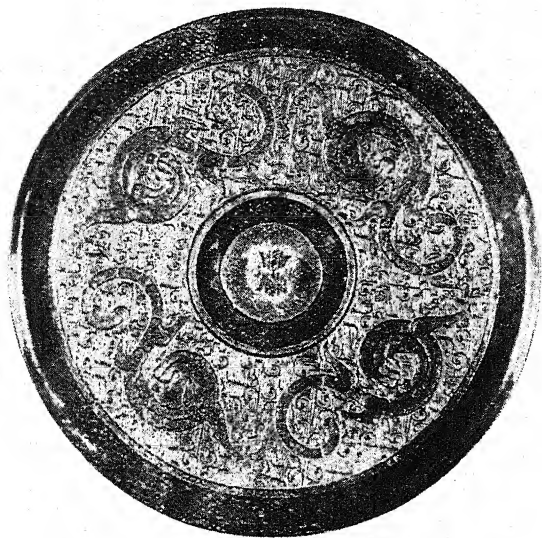
*Locality:* LOYANG

572.—LATE HAN MIRROR  
with four figures of conventionalised birds and with concatenated arcs



Diameter 14-cm.

594.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with dragon scrolls



Diameter 15-cm.

595.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with four animals on a ground of feather-like animal pattern



Diameter  $13\frac{1}{2}$ -cm.

596.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

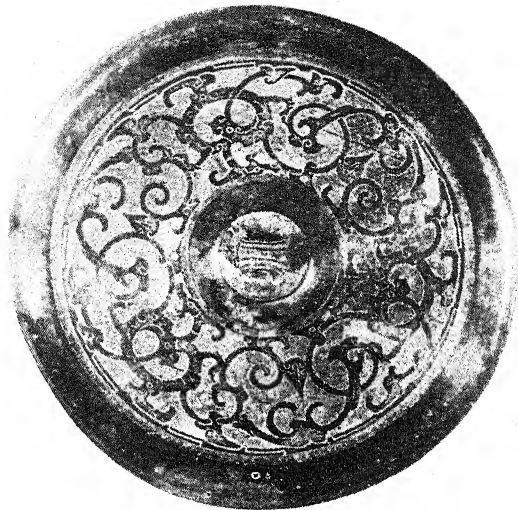
figures of four animals on a ground of feather-like animal pattern



Diameter 16-cm.

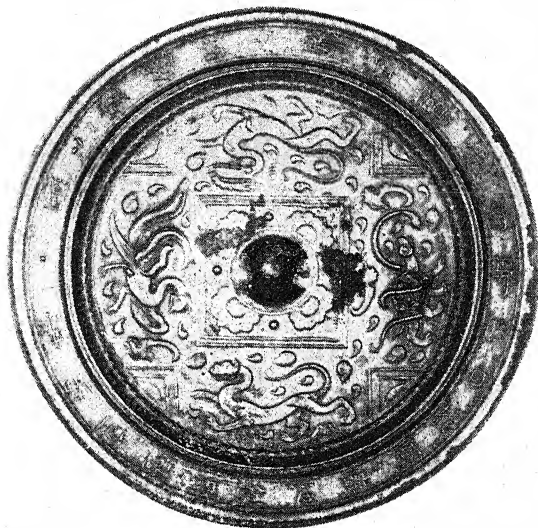
597.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR

with figures of four animals on a ground of feather-like animal pattern



Diameter 19-cm.

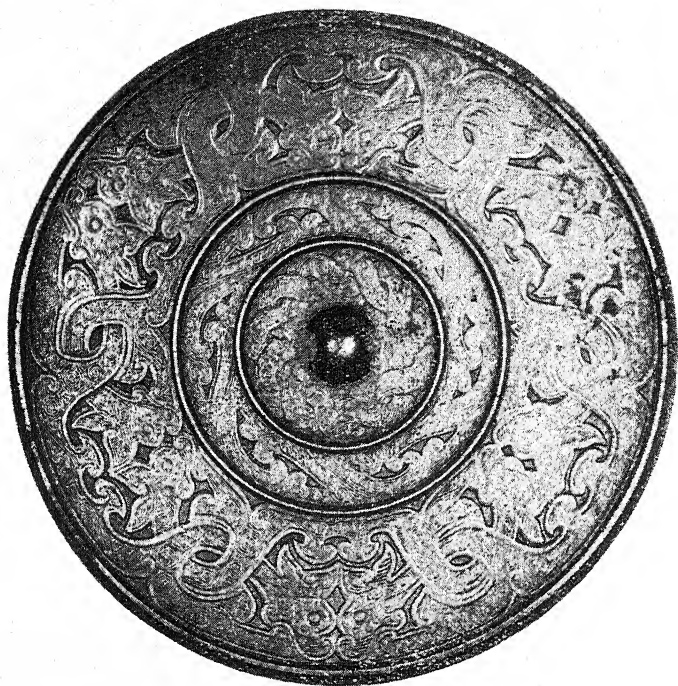
599.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with dragon scrolls



Diameter 17-cm.

*Locality : LOYANG*

603.—SIX DYNASTIES MIRROR  
with figures of four sacred animals and with inscription



Diameter 17-cm.

From Loyang

601.—MIRROR (PROBABLY T'ANG)  
with modified dragon scrolls

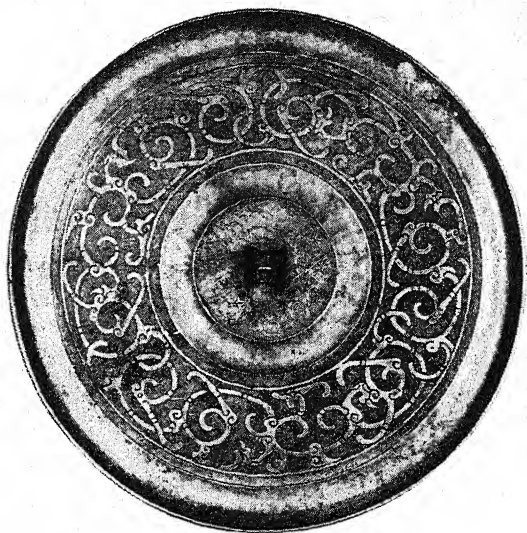




Diameter 25-cm.

*Locality:* HUEIHSIEN (Honan)

602.—SIX DYNASTIES MIRROR  
with animal figures and twelve zodiacal signs ; with inscription



Diameter  $16\frac{1}{3}$ -cm.

604.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with dragon scrolls



Diameter 15-cm.

609.—HUI VALLEY MIRROR  
with figures of four animals on a ground of feather-like animal pattern

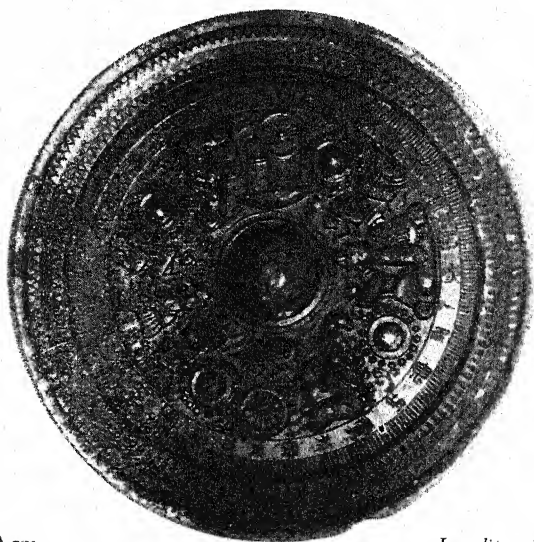


Diameter 14-cm.

*Locality : LOYANG*

616.—HAN MIRROR

with animal figures and with an outer circle of animal designs



Diameter 20-cm.

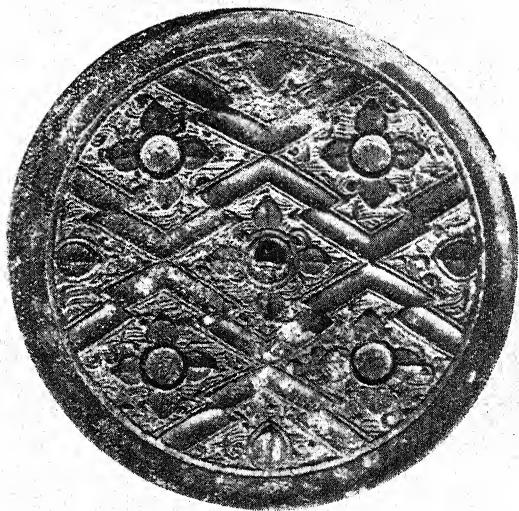
*Locality : HUAI VALLEY*

*Remarks : Cracked*

617.—HAN MIRROR

With war-chariots and genre figures and an inscription.

Cast in commemoration of the conquest of Hsi Yu, the Western Countries. The seated figures with attendants are Hsi Wang Mu and T'ien Wang Fu.



Diameter 10-cm.

*Locality* : HUAI VALLEY

619.—CH'IN TYPE MIRROR

with geometric designs (variation of the TLV motif) and flowers on  
a feather-like animal pattern



Diameter 13-cm.

*Locality* : KINCHENG (LOYANG)

*Remarks* : Broken and repaired

621.—CH'IN MIRROR

showing variation of the TLV design

## HUAII VALLEY CULTURE

THE remarkable bronzes and jades which have been found near Showchow in Anhwei and in other parts of the Huai River Valley show a distinct Ch'in influence, but are somewhat inferior in workmanship and on the whole are less intricate in design. They are now known as products of the Huai River Valley Culture.

A few unmistakably Ch'in pieces are found in the Huai River Valley, while pieces from that district may be found in various parts of Honan and Shensi.

It has been suggested that the Huai River Valley Culture coincides with the time of the Kingdom of Ch'u 楚國. Against this we have the fact that a number of bronzes have lately been discovered in the Huai River Valley which, from their inscriptions, date from the State of Ch'u but are of a quite distinct type and show no trace whatever of Ch'in influence.

In addition it must be remembered that the Ch'in and Ch'u states were mortal enemies and in the end Ch'in overcame and subjected its rival, forming the first real United Kingdom of China.

A very interesting theory has been put forward by a well-known Chinese collector of Huai River Valley bronzes to the effect that the Ch'in artistic influence there was largely due to Sun Chien 孫堅, who found the seal of Ch'in Shih Huang in a well near Hsianfu and took it with him to Showchow where he resisted the efforts of Yüan Shu 袁術 and others to take it from him.

Both Sun Chien and his son, Sun Ch'üan 孫權, are famous heroes of the San Kuo period and their deeds form part of the history of the latter days of the Han Dynasty, some 400 years after the death of Ch'in Shih Huang.

The Huai River Valley bronzes are famous for their beautiful patina and some of them have an appearance like jade.

# APPENDIX 2

## COMPOSITION OF SOME ANCIENT CHINESE BRONZES

SEVEN specimens were analysed, and in three cases the composition of the "impurities" was ascertained. The results were as follows:—

### 1.—San Tai bronze, North Honan.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	79.4 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	13.9 %
Bismuth	...	...	...	...	...	0.1 %
Iron	...	...	...	...	...	0.13%
Silver, lead, arsenic, etc.	...	...	...	...	absent	
Corrosion products as oxygen	...	...	...	...	...	
Chlorine, carbonic acid, etc.	...	...	...	...	...	6.47%

### 2.—Ch'in Mirror, Loyang.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	74.6 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	20.65%
Lead	...	...	...	...	...	1.86%
Iron	...	...	...	...	...	0.45%
Bismuth	...	...	...	...	...	0.16%
Corrosion products	...	...	...	...	...	2.28%
Silver, arsenic, etc.	...	...	...	...	absent	

### 3.—Han Mirror, Loyang.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	72.3 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	22.9 %
Lead	...	...	...	...	...	3.28%
Impurities	...	...	...	...	...	1.52%
Silver	...	...	...	...	absent	

### 4.—Han Presentation Mirror, North Honan.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	72.8 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	26.0 %
Impurities	...	...	...	...	...	1.2 %
Silver, lead...	...	...	...	...	absent	

### 5.—Six Dynasties Mirror, Loyang.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	72.95%
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	25.24%
Impurities	...	...	...	...	...	1.81%
Silver, lead...	...	...	...	...	absent	

## 6.—T'ang, "Sea-horse and Grape" type of mirror, Loyang.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	68.4 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	26.15%
Lead	...	...	...	...	...	3.07%
Iron	...	...	...	...	...	0.24%
Bismuth	...	...	...	...	...	0.2 %
Impurities such as gases, silica, coal	...	...	...	...	...	1.94%
Silver, arsenic, etc.	...	...	...	...	absent	

## 7.—T'ang Dynasty Mirror.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	70.4 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	22.93%
Lead	...	...	...	...	...	5.61%
Silver	...	...	...	...	trace	
Impurities	...	...	...	...	...	1.06%

Characteristic of the Chinese mirror bronzes is the low contents of tin compared with the European mirror bronzes. The best composition of bronze for mirrors is 68 per cent of copper with 32 per cent of tin. The material in Chinese mirrors is therefore rather inferior from a metallurgical point of view. For comparison the composition of a few western bronzes is given below.

## A.—A 5-ton telescope-mirror in Birr Castle, Ireland.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	70.3 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	29.1 %
Impurities	...	...	...	...	...	0.6 %

## B.—A reflector in the Polytechnicum, Braunschweig, Germany.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	65.2 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	34.8 %

## C.—Antique Egyptian Mirror.

Copper	...	...	...	...	...	85 %
Tin	...	...	...	...	...	15 %

Curiously enough, the composition of the old Egyptian mirror is very nearly the same as the San Tai bronze (Sample 1).

The Chinese bronzes used for mirrors are nearly of the same composition as the bell-bronzes used in Europe during the Middle Ages, which contain 75-80 per cent of copper, 20-25 per cent of tin, and often 1.4 per cent of lead.

(Signed): S. J. F. JENSEN

## GLOSSARY

- Azure Dragon* 青龍—in the East Quadrant: pp. 20, 29; ill. 49; see *Ssu Shen Ching*.
- bat*—see *pien fu*.
- bat in the cloud motif*—pp. 19, 43; ill. 44.
- bird footprint* 鳥足紋—name of a style of writing in vogue during the Han period; used sometimes on mirrors: p. 47.
- black enamel*—see *hei ch'i ku*.
- butterfly*—ill. 65.
- cassia tree in the moon*:—ill. 23.
- caltrop, ling hua* 菱花—a frequent feature in the designs of Han and Six Dynasty mirrors: pp. 14, 20; ill. 21, 39, 64.
- ch'an wen* 蟬紋—cicada or broad locust pattern: ill. 7.
- Chang Fu Kuei* 長富貴—"Continual Happiness and Prosperity"; these characters are often found on Han mirrors: p. 22.
- Chang i tzu sun* 長宜子孫—"May you have forever dutiful sons and grandsons"; quotation found on Han mirrors: p. 47; ill. 1, 26.
- chi*—pun on the word: ill. 33.
- ch'i lin* 麒麟—the unicorn symbolic of illustrious birth. In the *Book of Odes* a comparison is made between the sons, grandchildren and parents of a prince and the feet, front and horns of the ch'i-lin: ill. 57.
- chia ching* 夾鏡—term for enamel mirror with gold and silver inlay: p. 8.
- ch'ien ch'iu* 千秋—"thousand autumns," a literary expression for long life: ill. 30.
- ch'ien k'eng* 鉛坑—"lead pit"; gives objects buried in it an appearance of lead: p. 25.
- ch'ing lung* 青 or 蒼龍—Azure Dragon of the East: ill. 5, 21, 25, 49.
- chin k'e* 金壳—"gold-covered": pp. 35, 58.
- chiu ju* 九如—the "nine similitudes," in congratulatory phrases: 21.



- Chu Niao* 朱雀 or 鳥—Red Bird of the South : ill. 5, 21, 25, 49.
- chu wen* 珠紋—pearl design : ill. 55, 56.
- ch'ian yün* 踰雲—coiled-up cloud pattern : ill. 66.
- Chiin i kao kuan* 君宜高官—"May you reach high rank"; characters sometimes found on Han mirrors : pp. 33, 47; ill. 33, 34, 35.
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*shui k'êng* 水坑—"water pit"; objects buried in this kind of place usually have fine patina : p. 25.

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